

# **AUTUMN READING 2013**

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<b>SMALL WORLD</b> , by William F. Nolan	pg 2
<b>AN ANDALUSIAN DUEL</b> , by Serafin E. Calderon	11
<b>HYGEIA AT THE SOLITO</b> by O. Henry	15
<b>A BOOB SPELLED BACKWARD</b> , by Fannie Hurst	28
<b>THE CALL OF THE RACE</b> , by Elizabeth Cooper	64
<b>MELMOTH RECONCILED</b> , by Honore De Balzac	75
<b>RAMA AND LUXMAN</b> , by M. Frere	118
<b>DE AMICITIA</b> , by W. Somerset Maugham	126
<b>THE PIGTAIL OF HI WING HO</b> , by Sax Rohmer	143
<b>THE BLUE HOTEL</b> , by Stephen Crane	162

*What will happen when the alien ships strike Earth? And later? Who will survive? What will life be like in that latter-day jungle? William F. Nolan, well known in SF circles on the West Coast, returns with this grim story of the days and the nights of Lewis Stillman—survivor ...*

He was running, running down the long tunnels, the shadows hunting him, claws clutching at him, nearer ...

In the waiting windless dark, Lewis Stillman pressed into the building-front shadows along Wilshire Boulevard. Breathing softly, the automatic poised and ready in his hand, he advanced with animal stealth toward Western, gliding over the night-cool concrete, past ravaged clothing shops, drug and ten-cent stores, their windows shattered, their doors ajar and swinging. The city of Los Angeles, painted in cold moonlight, was an immense graveyard; the tall white tombstone buildings thrust up from the silent pavement, shadow-carved and lonely. Overturned metal corpses of trucks, busses and automobiles littered the streets.

He paused under the wide marquee of the FOX WILTERN. Above his head, rows of splintered display bulbs gaped—sharp glass teeth in wooden jaws. Lewis Stillman felt as though they might drop at any moment to pierce his body.

Four more blocks to cover. His destination: a small corner delicatessen four blocks south of Wilshire, on Western. Tonight he intended bypassing the larger stores like Safeway or Thriftmart, with their available supplies of exotic foods; a smaller grocery was far more likely to have what he needed. He was finding it more and more difficult to locate basic food stuffs. In the big supermarkets only the more exotic and highly spiced canned and bottled goods remained—and he was sick of caviar and oysters!

Crossing Western, he had almost reached the far curb when he saw some of them. He dropped immediately to his knees behind the rusting bulk of an Olds 88. The rear door on his side was open, and he cautiously eased himself into the back seat of the deserted car. Releasing the safety catch on the automatic, he peered through the cracked window at six or seven of them, as they moved toward him along the street. God! Had he been seen? He couldn't be sure. Perhaps they were aware of his position! He should have remained on the open street where he'd have a running chance. Perhaps, if his aim were true, he could kill most of them; but, even with its silencer, the gun would be heard and more of them would come. He dared not fire until he was certain they discovered him.

They came closer, their small dark bodies crowding the walk, six of them, chattering,

leaping, cruel mouths open, eyes glittering under the moon. Closer. The shrill pipings increased, rose in volume. Closer. Now he could make out their sharp teeth and matted hair. Only a few feet from the car ... His hand was moist on the handle of the automatic; his heart thundered against his chest. Seconds away ...

Now!

Lewis Stillman fell heavily back against the dusty seat-cushion, the gun loose in his trembling hand. They had passed by; they had missed him. Their thin pipings diminished, grew faint with distance.

The tomb silence of late night settled around him.

The delicatessen proved a real windfall. The shelves were relatively untouched and he had a wide choice of tinned goods. He found an empty cardboard box and hastily began to transfer the cans from the shelf nearest him.

A noise from behind—a padding, scraping sound.

Lewis Stillman whirled around, the automatic ready.

A huge mongrel dog faced him, growling deep in its throat, four legs braced for assault. The blunt ears were laid flat along the short-haired skull and a thin trickle of saliva seeped from the killing jaws. The beast's powerful chest-muscles were bunched for the spring when Stillman acted.

The gun, he knew, was useless; the shots would be heard. Therefore, with the full strength of his left arm, he hurled a heavy can at the dog's head. The stunned animal staggered under the blow, legs buckling. Hurriedly, Stillman gathered his supplies and made his way back to the street.

How much longer can my luck hold? Lewis Stillman wondered, as he bolted the door. He placed the box of tinned goods on a wooden table and lit the tall lamp nearby. Its flickering orange glow illumined the narrow, low-ceilinged room as Stillman seated himself on one of three chairs facing the table.

Twice tonight, his mind told him, twice you've escaped them—and they could have seen you easily on both occasions if they had been watching for you. They don't know you're alive. But when they find out ...

He forced his thoughts away from the scene in his mind away from the horror; quickly he stood up and began to unload the box, placing the cans on a long shelf along the far side of the room.

He began to think of women, of a girl named Joan, and of how much he had loved her ...

The world of Lewis Stillman was damp and lightless; it was narrow and its cold stone walls pressed in upon him as he moved. He had been walking for several hours; sometimes he would run, because he knew his leg muscles must be kept strong, but he was walking now, following the thin yellow beam of his hooded lantern. He was searching.

Tonight, he thought, I might find another like myself. Surely, someone is down here; I'll find someone if I keep searching. I must find someone!

But he knew he would not. He knew he would find only chill emptiness ahead of him in the tunnels.

For three long years he had been searching for another man or woman down here in this world under the city. For three years he had prowled the seven hundred miles of storm drains which threaded their way under the skin of Los Angeles like the veins in a giant's body—and he had found nothing. Nothing.

Even now, after all the days and nights of search, he could not really accept the fact that he was alone, that he was the last man alive in a city of seven million, that all the others were dead.

He paused, resting his back against the cold stone. Some of them were moving over the street above his head. He listened to the sharp scuffling sounds on the pavement and swore bitterly.

"Damn you," said Lewis Stillman levelly. "Damn all of you!"

Lewis Stillman was running down the long tunnels. Behind him a tide of midget shadows washed from wall to wall; high keening cries, doubled and tripled by echoes, rang in his ears. Claws reached for him; he felt panting breath, like hot smoke, on the back of his neck; his lungs were bursting, his entire body aflame.

He looked down at his fast-pumping legs, doing their job with pistoned precision. He listened to the sharp slap of his heels against the floor of the tunnel—and he thought: I might die at any moment, but my legs will escape! They will run on down the endless drains and never be caught. They move so fast while my heavy awkward upper-body rocks and sways above them, slowing them down, tiring them—making them angry. How my legs must hate me! I must be clever and humor them, beg them to take me along to safety. How well they run, how sleek and fine!

Then he felt himself coming apart. His legs were detaching themselves from his upper-body. He cried out in horror, flailing the air with his arms, beseeching them not to leave him behind. But the legs cruelly continued to unfasten themselves. In a cold surge of terror, Lewis Stillman felt himself tipping, falling toward the damp floor—while his legs raced on with a wild animal life of their own. He opened his mouth, high above the insane legs, and screamed.

Ending the nightmare.

He sat up stiffly in his cot, gasping, drenched in sweat. He drew in a long shuddering breath and reached for a cigarette. He lit it with a trembling hand.

The nightmares were getting worse. He realized that his mind was rebelling as he slept, spilling forth the bottled-up fears of the day during the night hours.

He thought once more about the beginning six years ago, about why he was still alive, the last of his kind. The alien ships had struck Earth suddenly, without warning. Their attack had been thorough and deadly. In a matter of hours the aliens had accomplished their clever mission—and the men and women of Earth were destroyed. A few survived, he was certain. He had never met any of them, but he was convinced they existed. Los Angeles was not the world, after all, and if he escaped so must have others around the globe. He'd been working alone in the drains when the alien ships appeared, finishing a special job for the construction company on B tunnel. He could still hear the weird sound of the mammoth ships and feel the intense heat of their passage.

Hunger had forced him out and overnight he became a curiosity. The last man alive. For three years he was not harmed. He worked with them, taught them many things, and tried to win their confidence. But, eventually, certain ones came to hate him, to be jealous of his relationship with the others. Luckily he had been able to escape to the drains. That was three years ago and now they had forgotten him.

His later excursions to the upper level of the city had been made under cover of darkness—and he never ventured out unless his food supply dwindled. Water was provided by rain during the wet-months—and by bottled liquids during the dry.

He had built his one-room structure directly to the side of an overhead grating—not close enough to risk their seeing it, but close enough for light to seep in during the sunlight hours. He missed the warm feel of open sun on his body almost as much as he missed the companionship of others, but he could not think of risking himself above the drains by day.

Sometimes he got insane thoughts. Sometimes, when the loneliness closed in like an immense fist and he could no longer stand the sound of his own voice, he would think of bringing one of them down with him, into the drains. One at a time, they could be handled. Then he'd remember their sharp savage eyes, their animal ferocity, and he would realize that the idea was impossible. If one of their kind disappeared, suddenly and without trace, others would certainly become suspicious, begin to search for him—and it would all be over.

Lewis Stillman settled back into his pillow, pulling the blankets tight about his body. He closed his eyes and tried not to listen to the distant screams, pipings and reedy cries filtering down from the street above his head.

Finally he slept.

He spent the afternoon with paper women. He lingered over the pages of some yellowed fashion magazines, looking at all the beautifully photographed models in their fine clothes. All slim and enchanting, these page-women, with their cool enticing eyes and perfect smiles, all grace and softness and glitter and swirled cloth. He touched their images with gentle fingers, stroking the tawny paper hair, as though, by some magic formula, he might imbue them with life. It was easy to imagine that these women had never really lived at all—that they were simply painted, in microscopic detail, by sly artists to give the illusion of photos. He didn't like to think about these women and how they died.

That evening Lewis Stillman watched the moon, round and high and yellow in the night sky, and he thought of his father, and of the long hikes through the moonlit Maine countryside, of hunting trips and warm campfires, of the Maine woods, rich and green in summer. He thought of his father's hopes for his future and the words of that tall, gray-haired figure came back to him.

"You'll be a fine doctor, Lewis. Study and work hard and you'll succeed. I know you will."

He remembered the long winter evenings of study at his father's great mahogany desk, pouring over medical books and journals, taking notes, sifting and re-sifting facts. He remembered one set of books in particular—Erickson's monumental three-volume text on surgery, richly bound and stamped in gold. He had always loved these books, above all others.

What had gone wrong along the way? Somehow, the dream had faded, the bright goal vanished and was lost. After a year of pre-med at the University of Southern Cal, he had given up medicine; he had become discouraged and quit college to take a laborer's job with a construction company. How ironic that this move should have saved his life! He'd wanted to work with his hands, to sweat and labor with the muscles of his body. He'd wanted to earn enough to marry Joan and then, later perhaps, he would have returned to finish his courses. It all seemed so far away now, his reason for quitting, for letting his father down.

Now, at this moment, an overwhelming desire gripped him, a desire to pour over Erickson's pages once again, to re-create, even for a brief moment, the comfort and happiness of his childhood.

He'd seen a duplicate set on the second floor of Pickwick's book store in Hollywood, in their used book department, and now he knew he must go after them, bring the books back with him to the drains. It was a dangerous and foolish desire, but he knew he would obey it. Despite the risk of death, he would go after the books tonight. Tonight.

One corner of Lewis Stillman's room was reserved for weapons. His prize, a Thompson

submachine, had been procured from the Los Angeles police arsenal. Supplementing the Thompson were two semi-automatic rifles, a Luger, a Colt .45 and a .22-caliber Hornet pistol, equipped with a silencer. He always kept the smallest gun in a spring-clip holster beneath his armpit, but it was not his habit to carry any of the larger weapons with him into the city. On this night, however, things were different.

The drains ended two miles short of Hollywood—which means he would be forced to cover a long and particularly hazardous stretch of ground in order to reach the book store. He therefore decided to take along the .30-caliber Savage rifle in addition to the small hand weapon.

You're a fool, Lewis, he told himself, as he slid the oiled Savage from its leather case. Are the books important enough to risk your life? Yes, another part of him replied, they are that important. If you want a thing badly enough and the thing is worthwhile, then you must go after it. If fear holds you like a rat in the dark, then you are worse than a coward; you betray yourself and the civilization you represent. Go out and bring the books back.

Running in the chill night wind. Grass, now pavement, now grass, beneath his feet. Ducking into shadows, moving stealthily past shops and theatres, rushing under the cold moon. Santa Monica Boulevard, then Highland, the Hollywood Boulevard, and finally—after an eternity of heartbeats—the book store.

Pickwick's.

Lewis Stillman, his rifle over one shoulder, the small automatic gleaming in his hand, edged silently into the store.

A paper battleground met his eyes.

In the filtered moonlight, a white blanket of broken-backed volumes spilled across the entire lower floor. Stillman shuddered; he could envision them, shrieking, scrabbling at the shelves, throwing books wildly across the room at one another. Screaming, ripping, destroying.

What of the other floors? What of the medical section?

He crossed to the stairs, spilled pages crackling like a fall of dry leaves under his step, and sprinted up the first short flight to the mezzanine. Similar chaos!

He hurried up to the second floor, stumbling, terribly afraid of what he might find. Reaching the top, his heart thudding, he squinted into the dimness.

The books were undisturbed. Apparently they had tired of their game before reaching these.

He slipped the rifle from his shoulder and placed it near the stairs. Dust lay thick all

around him, powdering up and swirling, as he moved down the narrow aisles; a damp, leathery mustiness lived in the air, an odor of mold and neglect.

Lewis Stillman paused before a dim hand-lettered sign: MEDICAL SECTION. It was just as he had remembered it. Holstering the small automatic, he struck a match, shading the flame with a cupped hand as he moved it along the rows of faded titles. Carter ... Davidson ... Enright ... Erickson. He drew in his breath sharply. All three volumes, their gold stamping dust-dulled but readable, stood in tall and perfect order on the shelf.

In the darkness, Lewis Stillman carefully removed each volume, blowing it free of dust. At last all three books were clean and solid in his hands.

Well, you've done it. You've reached the books and now they belong to you.

He smiled, thinking of the moment when he would be able to sit down at the table with his treasure, and linger again and again over the wondrous pages.

He found an empty carton at the rear of the store and placed the books inside. Returning to the stairs, he shouldered the rifle and began his descent to the lower floor.

So far, he told himself, my luck is still holding.

But as Lewis Stillman's foot touched the final stair, his luck ran out.

The entire lower floor was alive with them!

Rustling like a mass of great insects, gliding toward him, eyes gleaming in the half-light, they converged upon the stairs. They had been waiting for him.

Now, suddenly, the books no longer mattered. Now only his life mattered and nothing else. He moved back against the hard wood of the stair-rail, the carton of books sliding from his hands. They had stopped at the foot of the stair; they were silent, looking up at him, the hate in their eyes.

If you can reach the street, Stillman told himself, then you've still got half a chance. That means you've got to get through them to the door. All right then, move.

Lewis Stillman squeezed the trigger of the automatic and three shots echoed through the silent store. Two of them fell under the bullets as Stillman rushed into their midst.

He felt sharp nails claw at his shirt and trousers, heard the cloth ripping away in their grasp. He kept firing the small automatic into them, and three more dropped under the hail of bullets, shrieking in pain and surprise. The others spilled back, screaming, from the door.

The gun was empty. He tossed it away, swinging the heavy Savage rifle free from his



shoulder as he reached the street. The night air, crisp and cool in his lungs, gave him instant hope.

I can still make it, thought Stillman, as he leaped the curb and plunged across the pavement. If those shots weren't heard, then I've still got the edge. My legs are strong; I can outdistance them.

Luck, however, had failed him completely on this night. Near the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland, a fresh pack of them swarmed toward him over the street.

He dropped to one knee and fired into their ranks, the Savage jerking in his hands. They scattered to either side.

He began to run steadily down the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, using the butt of the heavy rifle like a battering ram as they came at him. As he neared Highland, three of them darted directly into his path. Stillman fired. One doubled over, lurching crazily into a jagged plate-glass store front. Another clawed at him as he swept around the corner to Highland. He managed to shake free.

The street ahead of him was clear. Now his superior leg-power would count heavily in his favor. Two miles. Could he make it back before others cut him off?

Running, re-loading, firing. Sweat soaking his shirt, rivering down his face, stinging his eyes. A mile covered. Half way to the drains. They had fallen back.

But more of them were coming, drawn by the rifle shots, pouring in from side streets, stores and houses.

His heart jarred in his body, his breath was ragged. How many of them around him? A hundred? Two hundred? More coming. God!

He bit down on his lower lip until the salt taste of blood was on his tongue. You can't make it, a voice inside him shouted, they'll have you in another block and you know it!

He fitted the rifle to his shoulder, adjusted his aim, and fired. The long rolling crack of the big weapon filled the night. Again and again he fired, the butt jerking into the flesh of his shoulder, the smell of powder in his nostrils.

It was no use. Too many of them.

Lewis Stillman knew that he was going to die.

The rifle was empty at last, the final bullet had been fired. He had no place to run because they were all around him, in a slowly closing circle.

He looked at the ring of small cruel faces and he thought: The aliens did their job perfectly; they stopped Earth before she could reach the age of the rocket, before she could threaten planets beyond her own moon. What an immensely clever plan it had been! To destroy every human being on Earth above the age of six—and then to leave as quickly as they had come, allowing our civilization to continue on a primitive level, knowing that Earth's back had been broken, that her survivors would revert to savagery as they grew into adulthood.

Lewis Stillman dropped the empty rifle at his feet and threw out his hands. "Listen," he pleaded, "I'm really one of you. You'll all be like me soon. Please, listen to me."

But the circle tightened relentlessly around Lewis Stillman. He was screaming when the children closed in.

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from Fantastic Universe August 1957. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note. Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

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**AN ANDALUSIAN DUEL**, by Serafin Estebanez Calderon  
from *First Love* by Various; EBook #15610

Through the little square of St. Anna, towards a certain tavern, where the best wine is to be quaffed in Seville, there walked in measured steps two men whose demeanor clearly manifested the soil which gave them birth. He who walked in the middle of the street, taller than the other by about a finger's length, sported with affected carelessness the wide, slouched hat of Ecija, with tassels of glass beads and a ribbon as black as his sins. He wore his cloak gathered under his left arm; the right, emerging from a turquoise lining, exposed the merino lambskin with silver clasps. The herdsman's boots--white, with Turkish buttons,--the breeches gleaming red from below the cloak and covering the knee, and, above all, his strong and robust appearance, dark curly hair, and eye like a red-hot coal, proclaimed at a distance that all this combination belonged to one of those men who put an end to horses between their knees and tire out the bull with their lance.

He walked on, arguing with his companion, who was rather spare than prodigal in his person, but marvelously lithe and supple. The latter was shod with low shoes, garters united the stockings to the light-blue breeches, the waistcoat was cane-colored, his sash light green, and jaunty shoulder-knots, lappets, and rows of buttons ornamented the carmelite jacket. The open cloak, the hat drawn over his ear, his short, clean steps, and the manifestations in all his limbs and movements of agility and elasticity beyond trial plainly showed that in the arena, carmine cloth in hand, he would mock at the most frenzied of Jarama bulls, or the best horned beasts from Utrera.

I--who adore and die for such people, though the compliment be not returned--went slowly in the wake of their worships, and, unable to restrain myself, entered with them the same tavern, or rather eating-house, since there they serve certain provocatives as well as wine, and I, as my readers perceive, love to call things by their right name. I entered and sat down at once, and in such a manner as not to interrupt Oliver and Roland, and that they might not notice me, when I saw that, as if believing themselves alone, they threw their arms with an amicable gesture round each others' neck, and thus began their discourse:

"Pulpete," said the taller, "now that we are going to meet each other, knife in hand--you here, I there,--\_one, two\_,--\_on your guard\_,--\_triz, traz\_,--\_have that\_,--\_take this and call it what you like\_--let us first drain a tankard to the music and measure of some songs."

"Señor Balbeja," replied Pulpete, drawing his face aside and spitting with the greatest neatness and pulchritude towards his shoe, "I am not the kind of man either for La Gorja or other similar earthly matters, or because a steel tongue is sheathed in my body, or my weasand slit, or for any other such trifle, to be provoked or vexed with such a friend as Balbeja. Let the wine be brought, and then, we will sing; and afterwards blood--blood to the hilt."

The order was given, they clinked glasses, and, looking one at the other, sang a Sevillian song.

This done, they threw off their cloaks with an easy grace, and unsheathed their knives with which to prick one another, the one Flemish with a white haft, the other from Guadix, with a guard to the hilt, both blades dazzling in their brightness, and sharpened and ground enough for operating upon cataracts, much less ripping up bellies and bowels. The two had already cleft the air several times with the said lancets, their cloak wound round their left arm--first drawing closer, then back, now more boldly and in bounds--when Pulpete hoisted the flag for parley, and said:

"Balbeja, my friend, I only beg you to do me the favor not to fan my face with \_Juilon\_ your knife, since a slash might use it so ill that my mother who bore me would not know me, and I should not like to be considered ugly; neither is it right to mar and destroy what God made in His likeness."

"Agreed," replied Balbeja; "I will aim lower."

"Except--except my stomach also, for I was ever a friend to cleanliness, and I should not like to see myself fouled in a bad way, if your knife and arm played havoc with my liver and intestines."

"I will strike higher; but let us go on."

"Take care of my chest, it was always weak."

"Then just tell me, friend, \_where\_ am I to sound or tap you?"

"My dear Balbeja, there's always plenty of time and space to hack at a man; I have here on my left arm a wen, of which you can make meat as much as you like."

"Here goes for it," said Balbeja, and he hurled himself like an arrow; the other warding off the thrust with his cloak, and both, like skilful

penmen, began again tracing S's and signatures in the air with dashes and flourishes without, however, raising a particle of skin.

I do not know what would have been the end of this onslaught, since my venerable, dry, and shriveled person was not suitable for forming a point of exclamation between two combatants; and the tavern-keeper troubled so little about what was happening that he drowned the stamping of their feet and clatter of the tumbling stools and utensils by scraping street music on a guitar as loud as he could. Otherwise he was as calm as if he were entertaining two angels instead of two devils incarnate.

I do not know, I repeat, how this scene would have ended, when there crossed the threshold a parsonage who came to take a part in the development of the drama. There entered, I say, a woman of twenty to twenty-two years of age, diminutive in body, superlative in audacity and grace. Neat and clean hose and shoes, short, black flounced petticoat, a linked girdle, head-dress or mantilla of fringed taffeta caught together at the nape of her neck, and a corner of it over her shoulder, she passed before my eyes with swaying hips, arms akimbo, and moving her head to and fro as she looked about her on all sides.

Upon seeing her the tavern-keeper dropped his instrument, and I was overtaken by perturbation such as I had not experienced for thirty years (I am, after all, only flesh and blood); but, without halting for such lay-figures, she advanced to the field of battle.

There was a lively to-do here; Don Pulpete and Don Balbeja when they saw Doña Gorja appear, first cause of the disturbance and future prize for the victor, increased their feints, flourishes, curvets, onsets, crouching, and bounds--all, however, without touching a hair. Our Helen witnessed in silence for a long time this scene in history with that feminine pleasure which the daughters of Eve enjoy at such critical moments. But gradually her pretty brow clouded over, until, drawing from her delicate ear, not a flower or earring, but the stump of a cigar, she hurled it amidst the jousts. Not even Charles V's cane in the last duel in Spain produced such favorable effects. Both came forward immediately with formal respect, and each, by reason of the discomposure of his person and clothes, presumed to urge a title by which to recommend himself to the fair with the flounces. She, as though pensive, was going over the passage of arms in her mind, and then, with firm and confident resolution, spoke thus:

"And is this affair for me?"

"Who else should it be for? since I--since nobody--" they replied in

the same breath.

"Listen, gentlemen," said she. "For females such as I and my parts, of my charms and descent--daughter of La Gatusa, niece of La Mèndez, and granddaughter of La Astrosa--know that there are neither pacts nor compacts, nor any such futile things, nor are any of them worth a farthing. And when men challenge each other, let the knife do its work and the red blood flow, so as not to have my mother's daughter present without giving her the pleasure of snapping her fingers in the face of the other. If you pretend you are fighting for me, it's a lie; you are wholly mistaken, and that not by halves. I love neither of you. Mingalaríos of Zafra is to my taste, and he and I look upon you with scorn and contempt. Good-by, my braves; and, if you like, call my man to account."

She spoke, spat, smoothed the saliva with the point of her shoe, looking Pulpete and Balbeja full in the face, and went out with the same expressive movements with which she entered.

The two unvarnished braggarts followed the valorous Doña Gorja with their eyes; and then with a despicable gesture drew their knives across their sleeve as though wiping off the blood there might have been, sheathed them at one and the same time, and said together:

"Through woman the world was lost, through a woman Spain was lost; but it has never been known, nor do ballads relate, nor the blind beggars sing, nor is it heard in the square or markets, that two valiant men killed each, other for another lover."

"Give me that fist, Don Pulpete."

"Your hand, Don Balbeja."

They spoke and strode out into the street, the best friends in the world, leaving me all amazed at such whimsicality.

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**HYGEIA AT THE SOLITO** by O. Henry  
from *Heart of the West*, eBook #1725

If you are knowing in the chronicles of the ring you will recall to mind an event in the early 'nineties when, for a minute and sundry odd seconds, a champion and a "would-be" faced each other on the alien side of an international river. So brief a conflict had rarely imposed upon the fair promise of true sport. The reporters made what they could of it, but, divested of padding, the action was sadly fugacious. The champion merely smote his victim, turned his back upon him, remarking, "I know what I done to dat stiff," and extended an arm like a ship's mast for his glove to be removed.

Which accounts for a trainload of extremely disgusted gentlemen in an uproar of fancy vests and neck-wear being spilled from their pullmans in San Antonio in the early morning following the fight. Which also partly accounts for the unhappy predicament in which "Cricket" McGuire found himself as he tumbled from his car and sat upon the depot platform, torn by a spasm of that hollow, racking cough so familiar to San Antonian ears. At that time, in the uncertain light of dawn, that way passed Curtis Raidler, the Nueces County cattleman--may his shadow never measure under six foot two.

The cattleman, out this early to catch the south-bound for his ranch station, stopped at the side of the distressed patron of sport, and spoke in the kindly drawl of his ilk and region, "Got it pretty bad, bud?"

"Cricket" McGuire, ex-feather-weight prizefighter, tout, jockey, follower of the "ponies," all-round sport, and manipulator of the gum balls and walnut shells, looked up pugnaciously at the imputation cast by "bud."

"G'wan," he rasped, "telegraph pole. I didn't ring for yer."

Another paroxysm wrung him, and he leaned limply against a convenient baggage truck. Raidler waited patiently, glancing around at the white hats, short overcoats, and big cigars thronging the platform. "You're from the No'th, ain't you, bud?" he asked when the other was partially recovered. "Come down to see the fight?"

"Fight!" snapped McGuire. "Puss-in-the-corner! 'Twas a hypodermic injection. Handed him just one like a squirt of dope, and he's asleep, and no tanbark needed in front of his residence. Fight!" He rattled a bit, coughed, and went on, hardly addressing the cattleman, but rather for the relief of voicing his troubles. "No more dead sure t'ings for

me. But Rus Sage himself would have snatched at it. Five to one dat de boy from Cork wouldn't stay t'ree rounds is what I invested in. Put my last cent on, and could already smell the sawdust in dat all-night joint of Jimmy Delaney's on T'irty-seventh Street I was goin' to buy. And den--say, telegraph pole, what a gazaboo a guy is to put his whole roll on one turn of the gaboozlum!"

"You're plenty right," said the big cattleman; "more 'specially when you lose. Son, you get up and light out for a hotel. You got a mighty bad cough. Had it long?"

"Lungs," said McGuire comprehensively. "I got it. The croaker says I'll come to time for six months longer--maybe a year if I hold my gait. I wanted to settle down and take care of myself. Dat's why I speculated on dat five to one perhaps. I had a t'ousand iron dollars saved up. If I wonned I was goin' to buy Delaney's cafe. Who'd a t'ought dat stiff would take a nap in de foist round--say?"

"It's a hard deal," commented Raidler, looking down at the diminutive form of McGuire crumpled against the truck. "But you go to a hotel and rest. There's the Menger and the Maverick, and--"

"And the Fi'th Av'noo, and the Waldorf-Astoria," mimicked McGuire. "Told you I went broke. I'm on de bum proper. I've got one dime left. Maybe a trip to Europe or a sail in me private yacht would fix me up--pa-per!"

He flung his dime at a newsboy, got his /Express/, propped his back against the truck, and was at once rapt in the account of his Waterloo, as expanded by the ingenious press.

Curtis Raidler interrogated an enormous gold watch, and laid his hand on McGuire's shoulder.

"Come on, bud," he said. "We got three minutes to catch the train."

Sarcasm seemed to be McGuire's vein.

"You ain't seen me cash in any chips or call a turn since I told you I was broke, a minute ago, have you? Friend, chase yourself away."

"You're going down to my ranch," said the cattleman, "and stay till you get well. Six months'll fix you good as new." He lifted McGuire with one hand, and half-dragged him in the direction of the train.

"What about the money?" said McGuire, struggling weakly to escape.



"Money for what?" asked Raidler, puzzled. They eyed each other, not understanding, for they touched only as at the gear of bevelled cog-wheels--at right angles, and moving upon different axes.

Passengers on the south-bound saw them seated together, and wondered at the conflux of two such antipodes. McGuire was five feet one, with a countenance belonging to either Yokohama or Dublin. Bright-beady of eye, bony of cheek and jaw, scarred, toughened, broken and reknit, indestructible, grisly, gladiatorial as a hornet, he was a type neither new nor unfamiliar. Raidler was the product of a different soil. Six feet two in height, miles broad, and no deeper than a crystal brook, he represented the union of the West and South. Few accurate pictures of his kind have been made, for art galleries are so small and the mutoscope is as yet unknown in Texas. After all, the only possible medium of portrayal of Raidler's kind would be the fresco--something high and simple and cool and unframed.

They were rolling southward on the International. The timber was huddling into little, dense green motts at rare distances before the inundation of the downright, vert prairies. This was the land of the ranches; the domain of the kings of the kine.

McGuire sat, collapsed into his corner of the seat, receiving with acid suspicion the conversation of the cattleman. What was the "game" of this big "geezer" who was carrying him off? Altruism would have been McGuire's last guess. "He ain't no farmer," thought the captive, "and he ain't no con man, for sure. W'at's his lay? You trail in, Cricket, and see how many cards he draws. You're up against it, anyhow. You got a nickel and gallopin' consumption, and you better lay low. Lay low and see w'at's his game."

At Rincon, a hundred miles from San Antonio, they left the train for a buckboard which was waiting there for Raidler. In this they travelled the thirty miles between the station and their destination. If anything could, this drive should have stirred the acrimonious McGuire to a sense of his ransom. They sped upon velvety wheels across an exhilarant savanna. The pair of Spanish ponies struck a nimble, tireless trot, which gait they occasionally relieved by a wild, untrammelled gallop. The air was wine and seltzer, perfumed, as they absorbed it, with the delicate redolence of prairie flowers. The road perished, and the buckboard swam the uncharted billows of the grass itself, steered by the practised hand of Raidler, to whom each tiny distant mott of trees was a signboard, each convolution of the low hills a voucher of course and distance. But McGuire reclined upon his spine, seeing nothing but a desert, and receiving the cattleman's

advances with sullen distrust. "W'at's he up to?" was the burden of his thoughts; "w'at kind of a gold brick has the big guy got to sell?" McGuire was only applying the measure of the streets he had walked to a range bounded by the horizon and the fourth dimension.

A week before, while riding the prairies, Raidler had come upon a sick and weakling calf deserted and bawling. Without dismounting he had reached and slung the distressed bossy across his saddle, and dropped it at the ranch for the boys to attend to. It was impossible for McGuire to know or comprehend that, in the eyes of the cattleman, his case and that of the calf were identical in interest and demand upon his assistance. A creature was ill and helpless; he had the power to render aid--these were the only postulates required for the cattleman to act. They formed his system of logic and the most of his creed. McGuire was the seventh invalid whom Raidler had picked up thus casually in San Antonio, where so many thousand go for the ozone that is said to linger about its contracted streets. Five of them had been guests of Solito Ranch until they had been able to leave, cured or better, and exhausting the vocabulary of tearful gratitude. One came too late, but rested very comfortably, at last, under a ratama tree in the garden.

So, then, it was no surprise to the ranchhold when the buckboard spun to the door, and Raidler took up his debile /protege/ like a handful of rags and set him down upon the gallery.

McGuire looked upon things strange to him. The ranch-house was the best in the country. It was built of brick hauled one hundred miles by wagon, but it was of but one story, and its four rooms were completely encircled by a mud floor "gallery." The miscellaneous setting of horses, dogs, saddles, wagons, guns, and cow-punchers' paraphernalia oppressed the metropolitan eyes of the wrecked sportsman.

"Well, here we are at home," said Raidler, cheeringly.

"It's a h--l of a looking place," said McGuire promptly, as he rolled upon the gallery floor in a fit of coughing.

"We'll try to make it comfortable for you, buddy," said the cattleman gently. "It ain't fine inside; but it's the outdoors, anyway, that'll do you the most good. This'll be your room, in here. Anything we got, you ask for it."

He led McGuire into the east room. The floor was bare and clean. White curtains waved in the gulf breeze through the open windows. A big willow rocker, two straight chairs, a long table covered with

newspapers, pipes, tobacco, spurs, and cartridges stood in the centre. Some well-mounted heads of deer and one of an enormous black javeli projected from the walls. A wide, cool cot-bed stood in a corner. Nueces County people regarded this guest chamber as fit for a prince. McGuire showed his eyeteeth at it. He took out his nickel and spun it up to the ceiling.

"T'ought I was lyin' about the money, did ye? Well, you can frisk me if you want. Dat's the last simoleon in the treasury. Who's goin' to pay?"

The cattleman's clear grey eyes looked steadily from under his grizzly brows into the huckleberry optics of his guest. After a little he said simply, and not ungraciously, "I'll be much obliged to you, son, if you won't mention money any more. Once was quite a plenty. Folks I ask to my ranch don't have to pay anything, and they very scarcely ever offers it. Supper'll be ready in half an hour. There's water in the pitcher, and some, cooler, to drink, in that red jar hanging on the gallery."

"Where's the bell?" asked McGuire, looking about.

"Bell for what?"

"Bell to ring for things. I can't--see here," he exploded in a sudden, weak fury, "I never asked you to bring me here. I never held you up for a cent. I never gave you a hard-luck story till you asked me. Here I am fifty miles from a bellboy or a cocktail. I'm sick. I can't hustle. Gee! but I'm up against it!" McGuire fell upon the cot and sobbed shiveringly.

Raidler went to the door and called. A slender, bright-complexioned Mexican youth about twenty came quickly. Raidler spoke to him in Spanish.

"Ylario, it is in my mind that I promised you the position of /vaquero/ on the San Carlos range at the fall /rodeo/."

"/Si, senor/, such was your goodness."

"Listen. This /senorito/ is my friend. He is very sick. Place yourself at his side. Attend to his wants at all times. Have much patience and care with him. And when he is well, or--and when he is well, instead of /vaquero/ I will make you /mayordomo/ of the Rancho de las Piedras. /Esta bueno/?"

"/Si, si--mil gracias, senor/." Ylario tried to kneel upon the floor in his gratitude, but the cattleman kicked at him benevolently, growling, "None of your operry-house antics, now."

Ten minutes later Ylario came from McGuire's room and stood before Raidler.

"The little /senor/," he announced, "presents his compliments" (Raidler credited Ylario with the preliminary) "and desires some pounded ice, one hot bath, one gin feez-z, that the windows be all closed, toast, one shave, one Newyorkheral', cigarettes, and to send one telegram."

Raidler took a quart bottle of whisky from his medicine cabinet. "Here, take him this," he said.

Thus was instituted the reign of terror at the Solito Ranch. For a few weeks McGuire blustered and boasted and swaggered before the cow-punchers who rode in for miles around to see this latest importation of Raidler's. He was an absolutely new experience to them. He explained to them all the intricate points of sparring and the tricks of training and defence. He opened to their minds' view all the indecorous life of a tagger after professional sports. His jargon of slang was a continuous joy and surprise to them. His gestures, his strange poses, his frank ribaldry of tongue and principle fascinated them. He was like a being from a new world.

Strange to say, this new world he had entered did not exist to him. He was an utter egoist of bricks and mortar. He had dropped out, he felt, into open space for a time, and all it contained was an audience for his reminiscences. Neither the limitless freedom of the prairie days nor the grand hush of the close-drawn, spangled nights touched him. All the hues of Aurora could not win him from the pink pages of a sporting journal. "Get something for nothing," was his mission in life; "Thirty-seventh" Street was his goal.

Nearly two months after his arrival he began to complain that he felt worse. It was then that he became the ranch's incubus, its harpy, its Old Man of the Sea. He shut himself in his room like some venomous kobold or flibbertigibbet, whining, complaining, cursing, accusing. The keynote of his plaint was that he had been inveigled into a gehenna against his will; that he was dying of neglect and lack of comforts. With all his dire protestations of increasing illness, to the eye of others he remained unchanged. His currant-like eyes were as bright and diabolic as ever; his voice was as rasping; his callous face, with the skin drawn tense as a drum-head, had no flesh to lose.

A flush on his prominent cheek bones each afternoon hinted that a clinical thermometer might have revealed a symptom, and percussion might have established the fact that McGuire was breathing with only one lung, but his appearance remained the same.

In constant attendance upon him was Ylario, whom the coming reward of the /mayordomo/ship must have greatly stimulated, for McGuire chained him to a bitter existence. The air--the man's only chance for life--he commanded to be kept out by closed windows and drawn curtains. The room was always blue and foul with cigarette smoke; whosoever entered it must sit, suffocating, and listen to the imp's interminable gasconade concerning his scandalous career.

The oddest thing of all was the relation existing between McGuire and his benefactor. The attitude of the invalid toward the cattleman was something like that of a peevish, perverse child toward an indulgent parent. When Raidler would leave the ranch McGuire would fall into a fit of malevolence, silent sullenness. When he returned, he would be met by a string of violent and stinging reproaches. Raidler's attitude toward his charge was quite inexplicable in its way. The cattleman seemed actually to assume and feel the character assigned to him by McGuire's intemperate accusations--the character of tyrant and guilty oppressor. He seemed to have adopted the responsibility of the fellow's condition, and he always met his tirades with a pacific, patient, and even remorseful kindness that never altered.

One day Raidler said to him, "Try more air, son. You can have the buckboard and a driver every day if you'll go. Try a week or two in one of the cow camps. I'll fix you up plumb comfortable. The ground, and the air next to it--them's the things to cure you. I knowed a man from Philadelphia, sicker than you are, got lost on the Guadalupe, and slept on the bare grass in sheep camps for two weeks. Well, sir, it started him getting well, which he done. Close to the ground--that's where the medicine in the air stays. Try a little hossback riding now. There's a gentle pony--"

"What've I done to yer?" screamed McGuire. "Did I ever doublecross yer? Did I ask you to bring me here? Drive me out to your camps if you want; or stick a knife in me and save trouble. Ride! I can't lift my feet. I couldn't sidestep a jab from a five-year-old kid. That's what your d--d ranch has done for me. There's nothing to eat, nothing to see, and nobody to talk to but a lot of Reubens who don't know a punching bag from a lobster salad."

"It's a lonesome place, for certain," apologised Raidler abashedly.

"We got plenty, but it's rough enough. Anything you think of you want,

the boys'll ride up and fetch it down for you."

It was Chad Murchison, a cow-puncher from the Circle Bar outfit, who first suggested that McGuire's illness was fraudulent. Chad had brought a basket of grapes for him thirty miles, and four out of his way, tied to his saddle-horn. After remaining in the smoke-tainted room for a while, he emerged and bluntly confided his suspicions to Raidler.

"His arm," said Chad, "is harder'n a diamond. He interduced me to what he called a shore-perplexus punch, and 'twas like being kicked twice by a mustang. He's playin' it low down on you, Curt. He ain't no sicker'n I am. I hate to say it, but the runt's workin' you for range and shelter."

The cattleman's ingenuous mind refused to entertain Chad's view of the case, and when, later, he came to apply the test, doubt entered not into his motives.

One day, about noon, two men drove up to the ranch, alighted, hitched, and came in to dinner; standing and general invitations being the custom of the country. One of them was a great San Antonio doctor, whose costly services had been engaged by a wealthy cowman who had been laid low by an accidental bullet. He was now being driven back to the station to take the train back to town. After dinner Raidler took him aside, pushed a twenty-dollar bill against his hand, and said:

"Doc, there's a young chap in that room I guess has got a bad case of consumption. I'd like for you to look him over and see just how bad he is, and if we can do anything for him."

"How much was that dinner I just ate, Mr. Raidler?" said the doctor bluffly, looking over his spectacles. Raidler returned the money to his pocket. The doctor immediately entered McGuire's room, and the cattleman seated himself upon a heap of saddles on the gallery, ready to reproach himself in the event the verdict should be unfavourable.

In ten minutes the doctor came briskly out. "Your man," he said promptly, "is as sound as a new dollar. His lungs are better than mine. Respiration, temperature, and pulse normal. Chest expansion four inches. Not a sign of weakness anywhere. Of course I didn't examine for the bacillus, but it isn't there. You can put my name to the diagnosis. Even cigarettes and a vilely close room haven't hurt him. Coughs, does he? Well, you tell him it isn't necessary. You asked if there is anything we could do for him. Well, I advise you to set him digging post-holes or breaking mustangs. There's our team ready. Good-

day, sir." And like a puff of wholesome, blustery wind the doctor was off.

Raidler reached out and plucked a leaf from a mesquite bush by the railing, and began chewing it thoughtfully.

The branding season was at hand, and the next morning Ross Hargis, foreman of the outfit, was mustering his force of some twenty-five men at the ranch, ready to start for the San Carlos range, where the work was to begin. By six o'clock the horses were all saddled, the grub wagon ready, and the cow-punchers were swinging themselves upon their mounts, when Raidler bade them wait. A boy was bringing up an extra pony, bridled and saddled, to the gate. Raidler walked to McGuire's room and threw open the door. McGuire was lying on his cot, not yet dressed, smoking.

"Get up," said the cattleman, and his voice was clear and brassy, like a bugle.

"How's that?" asked McGuire, a little startled.

"Get up and dress. I can stand a rattlesnake, but I hate a liar. Do I have to tell you again?" He caught McGuire by the neck and stood him on the floor.

"Say, friend," cried McGuire wildly, "are you bug-house? I'm sick--see? I'll croak if I got to hustle. What've I done to yer?"--he began his chronic whine--"I never asked yer to--"

"Put on your clothes," called Raidler in a rising tone.

Swearing, stumbling, shivering, keeping his amazed, shining eyes upon the now menacing form of the aroused cattleman, McGuire managed to tumble into his clothes. Then Raidler took him by the collar and shoved him out and across the yard to the extra pony hitched at the gate. The cow-punchers lolled in their saddles, open-mouthed.

"Take this man," said Raidler to Ross Hargis, "and put him to work. Make him work hard, sleep hard, and eat hard. You boys know I done what I could for him, and he was welcome. Yesterday the best doctor in San Antone examined him, and says he's got the lungs of a burro and the constitution of a steer. You know what to do with him, Ross."

Ross Hargis only smiled grimly.

"Aw," said McGuire, looking intently at Raidler, with a peculiar

expression upon his face, "the croaker said I was all right, did he? Said I was fakin', did he? You put him onto me. You t'ought I wasn't sick. You said I was a liar. Say, friend, I talked rough, I know, but I didn't mean most of it. If you felt like I did--aw! I forgot--I ain't sick, the croaker says. Well, friend, now I'll go work for yer. Here's where you play even."

He sprang into the saddle easily as a bird, got the quirt from the horn, and gave his pony a slash with it. "Cricket," who once brought in Good Boy by a neck at Hawthorne--and a 10 to 1 shot--had his foot in the stirrups again.

McGuire led the cavalcade as they dashed away for San Carlos, and the cow-punchers gave a yell of applause as they closed in behind his dust.

But in less than a mile he had lagged to the rear, and was last man when they struck the patch of high chaparral below the horse pens. Behind a clump of this he drew rein, and held a handkerchief to his mouth. He took it away drenched with bright, arterial blood, and threw it carefully into a clump of prickly pear. Then he slashed with his quirt again, gasped "G'wan" to his astonished pony, and galloped after the gang.

That night Raidler received a message from his old home in Alabama. There had been a death in the family; an estate was to divide, and they called for him to come. Daylight found him in the buckboard, skimming the prairies for the station. It was two months before he returned. When he arrived at the ranch house he found it well-nigh deserted save for Ylario, who acted as a kind of steward during his absence. Little by little the youth made him acquainted with the work done while he was away. The branding camp, he was informed, was still doing business. On account of many severe storms the cattle had been badly scattered, and the branding had been accomplished but slowly. The camp was now in the valley of the Guadalupe, twenty miles away.

"By the way," said Raidler, suddenly remembering, "that fellow I sent along with them--McGuire--is he working yet?"

"I do not know," said Ylario. "Mans from the camp come verree few times to the ranch. So plentee work with the leetle calves. They no say. Oh, I think that fellow McGuire he dead much time ago."

"Dead!" said Raidler. "What you talking about?"

"Verree sick fellow, McGuire," replied Ylario, with a shrug of his



shoulder. "I theenk he no live one, two month when he go away."

"Shucks!" said Raidler. "He humbugged you, too, did he? The doctor examined him and said he was sound as a mesquite knot."

"That doctor," said Ylario, smiling, "he tell you so? That doctor no see McGuire."

"Talk up," ordered Raidler. "What the devil do you mean?"

"McGuire," continued the boy tranquilly, "he getting drink water outside when that doctor come in room. That doctor take me and pound me all over here with his fingers"--putting his hand to his chest--"I not know for what. He put his ear here and here and here, and listen--I not know for what. He put little glass stick in my mouth. He feel my arm here. He make me count like whisper--so--twenty, /treinta/, /cuarenta/. Who knows," concluded Ylario, with a deprecating spread of his hands, "for what that doctor do those verree droll and such-like things?"

"What horses are up?" asked Raidler shortly.

"Paisano is grazing out behind the little corral, /senor/."

"Saddle him for me at once."

Within a very few minutes the cattleman was mounted and away. Paisano, well named after that ungainly but swift-running bird, struck into his long lope that ate up the ground like a strip of macaroni. In two hours and a quarter Raidler, from a gentle swell, saw the branding camp by a water hole in the Guadalupe. Sick with expectancy of the news he feared, he rode up, dismounted, and dropped Paisano's reins. So gentle was his heart that at that moment he would have pleaded guilty to the murder of McGuire.

The only being in the camp was the cook, who was just arranging the hunks of barbecued beef, and distributing the tin coffee cups for supper. Raidler evaded a direct question concerning the one subject in his mind.

"Everything all right in camp, Pete?" he managed to inquire.

"So, so," said Pete, conservatively. "Grub give out twice. Wind scattered the cattle, and we've had to rake the brush for forty mile. I need a new coffee-pot. And the mosquitos is some more hellish than common."

"The boys--all well?"

Pete was no optimist. Besides, inquiries concerning the health of cow-punchers were not only superfluous, but bordered on flaccidity. It was not like the boss to make them.

"What's left of 'em don't miss no calls to grub," the cook conceded.

"What's left of 'em?" repeated Raidler in a husky voice. Mechanically he began to look around for McGuire's grave. He had in his mind a white slab such as he had seen in the Alabama church-yard. But immediately he knew that was foolish.

"Sure," said Pete; "what's left. Cow camps change in two months. Some's gone."

Raidler nerved himself.

"That--chap--I sent along--McGuire--did--he--"

"Say," interrupted Pete, rising with a chunk of corn bread in each hand, "that was a dirty shame, sending that poor, sick kid to a cow camp. A doctor that couldn't tell he was graveyard meat ought to be skinned with a cinch buckle. Game as he was, too--it's a scandal among snakes--lemme tell you what he done. First night in camp the boys started to initiate him in the leather breeches degree. Ross Hargis busted him one swipe with his chaparreras, and what do you reckon the poor child did? Got up, the little skeeter, and licked Ross. Licked Ross Hargis. Licked him good. Hit him plenty and everywhere and hard. Ross'd just get up and pick out a fresh place to lay down on agin.

"Then that McGuire goes off there and lays down with his head in the grass and bleeds. A hem'ridge they calls it. He lays there eighteen hours by the watch, and they can't budge him. Then Ross Hargis, who loves any man who can lick him, goes to work and damns the doctors from Greenland to Poland Chiny; and him and Green Branch Johnson they gets McGuire into a tent, and spells each other feedin' him chopped raw meat and whisky.

"But it looks like the kid ain't got no appetite to git well, for they misses him from the tent in the night and finds him rootin' in the grass, and likewise a drizzle fallin'. 'G'wan,' he says, 'lemme go and die like I want. He said I was a liar and a fake and I was playin' sick. Lemme alone.'

"Two weeks," went on the cook, "he laid around, not noticin' nobody, and then--"

A sudden thunder filled the air, and a score of galloping centaurs crashed through the brush into camp.

"Illustrious rattlesnakes!" exclaimed Pete, springing all ways at once; "here's the boys come, and I'm an assassinated man if supper ain't ready in three minutes."

But Raidler saw only one thing. A little, brown-faced, grinning chap, springing from his saddle in the full light of the fire. McGuire was not like that, and yet--

In another instant the cattleman was holding him by the hand and shoulder.

"Son, son, how goes it?" was all he found to say.

"Close to the ground, says you," shouted McGuire, crunching Raidler's fingers in a grip of steel; "and dat's where I found it--healt' and strengt', and tumbled to what a cheap skate I been actin'. T'anks fer kickin' me out, old man. And--say! de joke's on dat croaker, ain't it? I looked t'rough the window and see him playin' tag on dat Dago kid's solar plexus."

"You son of a tinker," growled the cattleman, "whyn't you talk up and say the doctor never examined you?"

"Ah--g'wan!" said McGuire, with a flash of his old asperity, "nobody can't bluff me. You never ast me. You made your spiel, and you t'rowed me out, and I let it go at dat. And, say, friend, dis chasin' cows is outer sight. Dis is de whitest bunch of sports I ever travelled with. You'll let me stay, won't yer, old man?"

Raidler looked wonderingly toward Ross Hargis.

"That cussed little runt," remarked Ross tenderly, "is the Jo-dartin'est hustler--and the hardest hitter in anybody's cow camp."

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**A BOOB SPELLED BACKWARD**, by Fannie Hurst  
from *Humoresque* EBook #9864

How difficult it is to think of great lives in terms of the small mosaics that go to make up the pattern of every man's day-by-day--the too tepid shaving-water; the badly laundered shirt-front; the three-minute egg; the too-short fourth leg of the table; the draught on the neck; the bad pen; the neighboring rooster; the misplaced key; the slipping chest-protector.

Richelieu, who walked with kings, presided always at the stitching of his red robes. Boswell says somewhere that a badly starched stock could kill his Johnson's morning. It was the hanging of his own chintzes that first swayed William Morris from epic mood to household utensils. Seneca, first in Latin in the whole Silver Age, prepared his own vegetables. There is no outgrowing the small moments of life, and to those lesser ones of us how often they become the large ones!

To Samuel Lipkind, who, in a span of thirty years, had created and carried probably more than his share of this world's responsibilities, there was no more predominant moment in all his day, even to the signing of checks and the six-o'clock making of cash, than that matinal instant, just fifteen minutes before the stroke of seven, when Mrs. Lipkind, in a fuzzy gray wrapper the color of her eyes and hair, kissed him awake, and, from across the hall, he could hear the harsh sing of his bath in the drawing.

There are moments like that which never grow old. For the fifteen years that Samuel Lipkind had reached the Two Dollar Hat Store before his two clerks, he had awakened to that same kiss on his slightly open mouth, the gray hair and the ever-graying eyes close enough to be stroked, the pungency of coffee seeming to wind like wreaths of mundane aroma above the bed, and always across the aisle of hallway that tepid cataract leaping in glory into porcelain.

Take the particular morning which ushers in our story, although it might have been any of twelve times three hundred others.

"Sammy!" This upon opening his door, then crossing to close the conservative five inches of open window and over to the bedside for the kissing him awake. "Sammy, get up!"

The snuggle away into the crotch of his elbow.

"Sammy! \_Thu, thu\_! I can't get him up! Sammy, a quarter to seven! You

want to be late? I can't get him up!"

"M-m-m-m-m!"

"You want your own clerks to beat you to business so they can say they got a lazy boss?"

"I'm awake, ma." Reaching up to stroke her hair, thin and gray now, and drawn back into an early-morning knob.

"Don't splash in the bath-room so this morning, Sammy; it's a shame for the wall-paper."

"I won't"--drawing the cord of his robe about his waist, and as if they did not both of them know just how faithfully disregarded would be that daily admonition.

Then Mrs. Lipkind flung back the snowy sheets and bed-coverings, baring the striped ticking of the mattress.

"Hurry, Sammy! I'm up so long I'm ready for my second cup of coffee."

"Two minutes." And off across the hall, whistling, towel across arm.

It was that little early moment sublimated by nothing more than the fusty beginnings of a workaday, the mere recollecting of which was one day to bring a wash of tears behind his eyes and a twist of anguish into his heart.

Next breakfast, and to dine within reach of the coal-range which brews it is so homely a fashion that even Mr. Lipkind, upon whom such matters of bad form lay as a matter of course, was wont to remonstrate.

"What's the matter with the dining-room, ma? Since when have dining-rooms gone out of style?"

Pouring his coffee from the speckled granite pot, Mrs. Lipkind would smile up and over it.

"All I ask is my son should never have it worse than to eat all his lifetime in just such a kitchen like mine. Off my kitchen floor I would rather eat than off some people's fine polished mahogany."

The mahogany was almost not far-fetched. There was a blue-and-white spick-and-spanness about Mrs. Lipkind's kitchen which must lie within the soul of the housewife who achieves it--the lace-edged shelves, the

scoured armament of dishpan, soup-pot, and what not; the white Swiss window-curtains, so starchy, and the two regimental geraniums on the sill; the roller-towel too snowy for mortal hand to smudge; the white sink, hand-polished; the bland row of blue-and-white china jars spicily inscribed to nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves. That such a kitchen could be within the tall and brick confines of an upper-Manhattan apartment-house was only another of the thousand thousand paradoxes over which the city spreads her glittering skirts. The street within roaring distance, the highway of Lenox Avenue flowing dizzily constantly past her windows, the interior of Mrs. Lipkind's apartment, from the chromos of the dear dead upon its walls to the upholstery of another decade against those walls, was as little of the day as if the sweep of the city were a gale across a mid-Victorian plain and the flow past the windows a broad river ruffled by wind.

"You're right, ma; there's not a kitchen in New York I'd trade it for. But what's the idea of paying rent on a dining-room?"

"Sa-y, if not for when Clara comes and how in America all young people got extravagant ideas, we was just as well off without one in our three rooms in Simpson Street."

"A little more of that mackerel, please."

You to whom the chilled grapefruit and the eggshell cup of morning coffee are a gastronomic feat not always easy to hurdle, raise not your digestive eyebrows. At precisely fifteen minutes past seven six mornings in the week, seven-thirty, Sundays, Mrs. Lipkind and her son sat down to a breakfast that was steamingly fit for those only who dwell in the headacheless kingdom of long, sleepful nights and fur-coatless tongues.

"A few more fried potatoes with it, Sammy?"

"Whoa! You want to feed me up for the fat boys' regiment!"

Mrs. Lipkind glanced quickly away, her profile seeming to quiver. "Don't use that word, Sam--even in fun--it's a knife in me."

"What word?"

"Regiment."

He reached across to pat the vein-corduroyed back of her hand.

"My little sweetheart mamma," he said.

She, in turn, put out her hand over his, her old sagging throat visibly constricting in a gulp, and her eyes as if they could never be finished with yearning over him. "You're a good boy, Sammy."

"Sure!"

"I always say no matter what it is bad my life has had for me with my twenty-five years a widow, my only daughter to marry out six hundred miles away from me, my business troubles when I had to lose the little store what your papa left me, nothing ain't nothing, Sammy, when a mother can raise for herself a boy like mine."

"You mean when a fellow can pick out for himself a little sweetheart mamma like mine."

"Sammy, stop it with your pinching-me nonsense like I was your best girl!"

"Well, ain't you?"

She paused, her cup of coffee half-way to her lips, the lines of her face seeming to want to lift into what would be a smile. "No, Sammy; your mother knows she ain't, and if she was anything but a selfish old woman, she would be glad that she ain't."

"Sh! 'Sh!" said Mr. Lipkind, reaching this time half across the table for a still steaming muffin and opening it so that its hot fragrance came out. "Sh! No April showers! Uh! Uh! Don't you dare!"

"I ain't," said Mrs. Lipkind, smiling through her tear and dashing at it with the back of her hand. "For why should I when I got only everything to be thankful for?"

"Now you're shouting!"

"How you think, Sammy, Clara likes a cheese pie for supper to-night? Last week I could see she didn't care much for the noodle pudding I baked her."

Mr. Lipkind, who was ever so slightly and prematurely bald and still more slightly and prematurely rotund, suffered a rush of color then, his ears suddenly and redly conspicuous.

"That's--that's what I started to tell you last night, ma. Clara telephoned over to the store in the afternoon she--she thought she wouldn't come to supper this Wednesday night, ma."

"Sammy--you--you and Clara 'ain't got nothing wrong together, the way you don't see each other so much these two months?"

"Of course not, ma; it's just happened a few times that way. The trade's in town; that's all."

"How is it all of a sudden a girl in the wholesale ribbon business should have the trade to entertain like she was in the cloak-and-suit chorus?"

"It's not that Clara's busy to-night, ma. She--she only thought she--for a change--there's a little side table for two--for three--where she boards--she thought maybe if--if you didn't mind, I'd go over to her place for Wednesday-night supper for a change. You know how a girl like Clara gets to feeling obligated."

"Obligated from eating once a week supper in her own future house!"

"She asked I should bring you, too, ma, but I know how bashful you are to go in places like that."

"In such a place where it's all style and no food--yes."

"That's it; so we--I thought, ma, that is, if you don't mind, instead of Clara here to-night for supper, I--I'd go over to her place. If you don't mind, ma."

There was a silence, so light, so slight that it would not have even held the dropping of a pin, but yet had a depth and a quality that set them both to breathing faster.

"Why, of course, Sammy, you should go!"

"I--we thought for a change."

"You should have told me yesterday, Sammy, before I marketed poultry."

"I know, ma; I--just didn't. Clara only 'phoned at four."

"A few more fried potatoes?"

"No more."

"Sit up straight, Sam, from out your round shoulders."



"You ain't--mad, ma?"

"For why, Sammy, should I be mad that you go to Clara for a change to supper. I'm glad if you get a change."

"It's not that, ma. It's just that she asked it. You know how a person feels, her taking her Wednesday-night suppers here for more than five years and never once have I--we--set foot in any of her boarding-houses. She imagines she's obligated. You know how Clara is, so independent."

"You should go. I hear, too, how Mrs. Schulem sets a good table."

"I'll be home by nine, ma--you sure you don't mind?"

"I wouldn't mind, Sammy, if it was twelve. Since when is it that a grown-up son has to apologize to his mother if he takes a step without her?"

"You can believe me, ma, but I've got so it don't seem like theater or nothing seems like going out without my little sweetheart mamma on one arm and Clara on the other."

"It's not right, Sammy, you should spoil me so. Don't think that even if you don't let me talk about it, I don't know in my heart how I'm in yours and Clara's way."

"Ma, now just you start that talk and you know what I'll do--I'll get up and leave the table."

"Sammy, if only you would let me talk about it!"

"You heard what I said."

"To think my son should have to wait with his engagement for five years and never once let his mother ask him why it is he waits. It ain't because of to-night I want to talk about it, Sam, but if I thought it was me that had stood between you and Clara all these five years, if--if I thought it was because of me you don't see each other so much here lately, I--"

"Ma!"

"I couldn't stand it, son. If ever a boy deserved happiness, that boy is you. A boy that scraped his fingers to the bone to marry his sister off well. A boy that took the few dollars left from my notion-store and made such a success in retail men's hats and has given it to his mother like

a queen. If I thought I was standing in such a boy's way, who ain't only a grand business man and a grand son and brother, but would make any girl the grandest husband that only his father before him could equal, I couldn't live, Sammy, I couldn't live."

"You should know how sick such talk makes me!"

"I haven't got hard feelings, Sammy, because Clara don't like it here."

"She does."

"For why should an up-to-date American girl like Clara like such an old-fashioned place as I keep? Nowadays, girls got different ideas. They don't think nothing of seventy-five-dollar suits and twelve-dollar shoes. I can't help it that it goes against my grain no matter how fine a money-maker a girl is. In the old country my sister Carrie and me never even had shoes on our feet until we were twelve, much less--"

"But, ma--"

"Oh, I don't blame her, Sam. I don't blame her that she don't like it the way I dish up everything on the table so we can serve ourselves. She likes it passed the way they did that night at Mrs. Goldfinger's new daughter-in-law's, where everything is carried from one to the next one, and you got to help yourself quick over your shoulders."

"Clara's like me, ma; she wants you to keep a servant to do the waiting on you."

"It ain't in me, Sam, to be bossed to by a servant, just like I can't take down off the walls pictures of your papa \_selig\_ and your grandma, because it ain't stylish they should be there. It's a feeling in me for my own flesh and blood that nothing can change."

"Clara don't want you to change that, ma."

"She's a fine, up-to-date girl, Sam. A girl that can work herself up to head floor-lady in wholesale ribbons and forty dollars a week has got in her the kind of smartness my boy should have in his wife. I'm an old woman standing in the way of my boy. If I wasn't, I could go out to Marietta, Ohio, by Ruby, and I wouldn't keep having inside of me such terrible fears for my boy and--and how things are now on the other side and--and--"

"Now, now, ma; no April showers!"

"An old woman that can't even be happy with a good daughter like Ruby, but hangs always on her son like a stone around his neck!"

"You mean like a diamond."

"A stone, holding him down."

"Ma!" Mr. Lipkind pushed back, napkin awry at his throat and his eyes snapping points of light. "Now if you want to spoil my breakfast, just say so and I--I'll quit. Why should you be living with Ruby out in Marietta if you're happier here with me where you belong? If you knew how sore these here fits of yours make me, you'd cut them out--that's what you would. I'm not going over to Clara's at all now for supper, if that's how you feel about it."

Mrs. Lipkind rose then, crossed, leaning over the back of his chair and inclosing his face in the quivering hold of her two hands. "Sammy, Sammy, I didn't mean it! I know I ain't in your way. How can I be when there ain't a day passes I don't invite you to get married and come here to live and fix the flat any way what Clara wants or even move down-town in a finer one where she likes it? I know I ain't in your way, son. I take it back."

"Well, that's more like it."

"You mustn't be mad at mamma when she gets old-fashioned ideas in her head."

He stroked her hand at his cheek, pressing it closer.

"Sit down and finish your breakfast, little sweetheart mamma."

"Is it all right now, Sammy?"

"Of course it is!" he said, his eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"Promise mamma you'll go over by Clara's to-night."

"But--"

"Promise me, Sammy; I can't stand it if you don't."

"Alright, I'll go, ma."

The Declaration of Economic Independence is not always a subtle one. There was that about Clara Bloom, even to the rather Hellenic swing of

her very tailor-made back and the firm, neat clack of her not too high heels, which proclaimed that a new century had filed her fetter-free from the nine-teen-centuries-long chain of women whose pin-money had too often been blood-money or the filched shekels from trousers pocket or what in the toga corresponded thereto.

And yet, when Miss Bloom smiled, which upon occasion she did spontaneously enough to show a gold molar, there were not only Hypatia and Portia in the straight line of her lips, but lurked in the little tip-tilt at the corners a quirk from Psyche, who loved and was so loved, and in the dimple in her chin a manhole, as it were, for Mr. Samuel Lipkind.

At six o'clock, where the wintry workaday flows into dusk and Fifth Avenue flows across Broadway, they met, these two, finding each other out in the gaseous shelter of a Subway kiosk. She from the tall, thin, skylightless skyscraper dedicated to the wholesale supply of woman's insatiable demand for the ribbon gewgaw; he from a plate-glass shop with his name inscribed across its front and more humbly given over to the more satiable demand of the male for the two-dollar hat. There was a gold-and-black sign which ran across the not inconsiderable width of Mr. Lipkind's store-front and which invariably captioned his four inches of Sunday-news-paper advertisement:

### SAMMY LIPKIND WANTS YOUR HEAD

As near as it is possible for the eye to simulate the heart, there was exactly that sentiment in his glance now as he found out Miss Bloom, she in a purple-felt hat and the black scallops of escaping hair, blacker because the red was out in her cheeks.

He broke into the kind of smile that lifted his every feature, screw-lines at his eyes coming out, head bared, and his greeting beginning to come even before she was within hearing distance of it.

There was in Mr. Lipkind precious little of Lothario, Launcelot, Galahad, or any of that blankety-blank-verse coterie. There remains yet unsung the lay of the five-foot-five, slightly bald, and ever so slightly rotund lover. Falstaff and Romeo are the extremes of what Mr. Lipkind was the not unhappy medium. Offhand in public places, men would swap crop conditions and city politics with him. Twice, tired mothers in railway stations had volunteered him their babies to dandle. Young women, however, were not all impervious to him, and uncrossed their feet and became consciously unconscious of him across street-car aisles. In his very Two Dollar Hat Store, Sara Minniesinger, hooked of profile, but who had impeccably kept his debits and credits for twelve years back

under the stock-balcony and a green eye-shade, was wont to cry of evenings over and for him into her dingy pillow. He was so unconscious of this that, on the twelfth anniversary of her incarceration beneath the stock-balcony, he commissioned his mother to shop her a crown of thorns in the form of a gold-handled umbrella with a bachelor-girl flash-light attachment.

There are men like that, to whom life is not only a theosophy of one God, but of one women who is sufficient thereof. When Samuel Lipkind greeted Clara Bloom there was just that in his ardently appraising glance.

"Didn't mean to keep you waiting, Clara--a last-minute customer. \_You\_ know."

"I've been counting red heads and wishing the Subway was pulled by white horses."

"Say, Clara, but you look a picture! Believe me, Bettina, that is some lid!"

Miss Bloom tucked up a rear strand of curl, turning her head to extreme profile for his more complete approval.

"Is it an elegant trifle, Sam? I ask you is it an elegant trifle?"

"Clara, it's--immense! The best yet! What did it set you back?"

"Don't ask me! I'm afraid just saying it would give your mother heart-failure by mental telepathy."

He linked her arm. "Whatever you paid, it's worth the money. It sets you off like a gipsy queen."

"None of that, Sam! Mush is fattening."

"Mush nothing! It's the truth."

"Hurry. Schulem's got a new rule--no reserving the guest-table."

They let themselves be swept into the great surge of the underground river with all of the rather thick-skinned unsensitiveness to shoulder-to-shoulder contact which the Subway engenders. Swaying from straps in a locked train, which tore like a shriek through a tube whose sides sweated dampness, they talked in voices trained to compete with the roar.

"What's the idea, Clara? When you telephoned yesterday I was afraid maybe it was--Eddie Leonard cutting in on my night again."

"Eddie nothing. Is it a law, Sam, that I have to eat off your mother every Wednesday night of my life?"

"No--only--you know how it is when you get used to things one way."

"I told you I had something to talk over, didn't I?"

They were rounding a curve now, so that they swayed face to face, nose to nose.

A few crinkles, frequent with him of late, came out in rays from his eyes.

"Is it anything you--you couldn't say in front of ma?"

"Yes."

He inserted two fingers into his collar, rearing back his head.

"Anything wrong, Clara?"

"You mean is anything right."

They rode in silence after that, both of them reading in three colors the border effulgencies of frenzied advertising.

But when they emerged to a quieter up-town night that was already pointed with a first star, he took her arm as they turned off into a side-street that was architecturally a barracks to the eye, brownstone front after brownstone front after brownstone front. Block after block of New York's side-streets are sunk thus in brown study.

"You mustn't be so ready to be put out over every little thing I say, Clara. Is it anything wrong to want you up at the house just as often as we can get you?"

"No, Sam; it ain't that."

"Well then, what is it?"

"Oh, what's the use beginning all that again? I want to begin to-night where we usually leave off."

"Is it--is it something we've talked about before, Clara?"

"Yes--and no. We've talked so much and so long without ever getting anywheres--what's the difference whether we've ever talked it before or not?"

"You just wait, Clara; everything is going to come out fine for us."

Her upper lip lifted slightly. "Yes," she said; "I've heard that before."

"We're going to be mighty happy some day, just the same, and don't you let yourself forget it. We've got good times ahead."

"Oh dear!" she sighed out.

"What?"

"Nothing."

He patted her arm. "You'll never know, Clara, the torture it's been for me even your going out those few times with Eddie Leonard has put me through. You're mine, Clara; a hundred Eddies couldn't change that."

"Who said anybody wanted to change it?"

He patted her arm again very closely. "You're a wonderful girl, Clara."

They turned up the stoop of Mrs. Schulem's boarding-house, strictly first-class. How they flourish in the city, these institutions of the Not Yet, the Never Was, the Never Will Be, and the Has Been! They are the half-way houses going up and the mausoleums coming down life's incline, and he who lingers is lost to the drab destiny of this or that third-floor-back hearthstone, hot and cold running water, all the comforts of home. That is why, even as she moved up from the rooming to the boarding-house and down from the third-floor back to the second-story front, there was always under Clara Bloom's single bed the steamer-trunk scarcely unpacked, and in her heart the fear that, after all, this might not be transiency, but home. That is why, too, she paid her board by the week and used printed visiting-cards.

And yet, if there exists such a paradox as an aristocracy among boarding-houses, Mrs. Schulem's was of it. None of the boiled odors lay on her hallways, which were not papered, but a cream-colored fresco of better days. There was only one pair of bisques, no folding-bed, and but

the slightest touch of dried grasses in her unpartitioned front parlor. The slavey who opened the door was black-faced, white-coated, and his bedraggled skirts were trousers with a line of braid up each seam. Two more of him were also genii of the basement dining-hall, two low rooms made into one and entirely bisected by a long-stemmed T of dining-table, and between the lace-curtained windows a small table for two, with fairly snowy napkins flowering out of its water-tumblers, and in its center a small island of pressed-glass vinegar-cruet, bottle of darkly portentous condiment, glass of sugar, and another of teaspoons.

It was here that Miss Bloom and Mr. Lipkind finally settled themselves, snugly and sufficiently removed from the T-shaped battalion of eyes and ears to insure some privacy.

"Well," said Mr. Lipkind, unflowering his napkin, spreading it across his knees, and exhaling, "this is fine!"

There was an aura of authoritativeness seemed to settle over Miss Bloom.

This to one of the black-faced genii: "Take care of us right to-night, Johnson, and I'll fix it up with you. See if you can't manage it in the kitchen to bring us a double portion of those banana fritters I see they're eating at the big table. Say they're for Miss Bloom. I'll fix it up with you."

"Now, Clara, don't you go bothering with extras for me. This is certainly fine. Sorry you never asked me before."

"You know why I never asked you before."

"Why, you never saw the like how pleased ma was. She was the first one to fall in with the idea of my coming to-night."

She dipped into a shallow plate of amber soup. "I know," she said, "all about that."

"Ma's a good sport about being left at home alone."

"How do you know? You never tried it until to-night. I'll bet it's the first time since that night you first met me, five years ago, at Jerome Fertig's, and it wouldn't have been then if she hadn't had the neuralgia and it was your own clerk's wedding."

He laid down his spoon, settling back a bit from the table, pulling the napkin across his knees out into a string.



"I thought we'd gone all over that, Clara."

"Yes; but where did it get us? That's why we're here to-night, Sam--to get somewheres."

He crumbed his bread. "What do you mean, Clara?"

She forced his slow gaze to hers calmly, her hands outstretched on the table between them. "I've made up my mind, Sam. Things can't go on this way no longer between us."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that we've either got to act or quit."

He was rolling the bread pills again, a flush rising. "You know where I stand, Clara, on things between us."

"Yes, Sam, and now you know where I stand." The din of the dining-room surged over the pause between them. Still in the purple hat, and her wrap thrown back over her chair, she held that pause coolly, level of eye. "I'm thirty-one now, Sam, three weeks and two days older than you. I don't see the rest of my days with the Arnstein Ribbon Company. I'm not getting any younger. Five years is a long time out of a girl's life. Five of the best ones, too. She likes to begin to see her future when she reaches my age. A future with a good providing man. You and me are just where we started five years ago."

"I know, Clara, and I'd give my right hand to change things."

"If I'd been able to save a cent, it might be different. But I haven't--I'm that way. I make big and spend big. But you can't blame a girl for wanting to see her future. That's me, and I'm not ashamed to say it."

"If only, Clara, I could get you to see things my way. If you'd be willing to try it with ma. Why, with a little diplomacy from you, ma'd move heaven and earth to please you."

"There's no use beginning that, Sam; it's a waste of time. Why--why, just the difference in the way me and--and your mother feel on money matters is enough. There's no use to argue that with me; it's a waste of time."

He lifted and let droop his shoulders with something of helplessness in the gesture. "What's the use, then? I'm sure I don't know what more to

say to you, Clara. Oh, don't think my mother don't realize how things are between us--it's all I can do to keep denying and denying."

"Well, you can't say she knows from my telling."

"No; but there's not a day she don't say to me, particularly these last few times since you been breaking your dates with us pretty regular--I--well she sees how it worries me, and there's not a day she don't say to me, 'Sammy,' she said to me, only this morning, 'if I thought I was keeping you and Clara apart--'"

"A blind man could see it."

"There's not a day passes over her head she don't offer to go to live with my sister in Ohio, when I know just how that one month of visiting her that time nearly killed her."

"Funny visiting an own daughter could nearly kill anybody."

"It's my brother-in-law, Clara. My mother couldn't no more live with Isadore Katz than she could fly. He's a fine fellow and all that, but she's not used to a man in the house that potters around the kitchen and the children's food and things like Isadore loves to. She's used to her own little home and her own little way."

"Exactly."

"If I want to kill my mother, Clara, all I got to do is put her away from me in her old age. Even my sister knows it. 'Sammy,' she wrote to me that time after ma's visit out there, 'I love our mother like you do, but I got a nervous husband who likes his own ways about the housekeeping and the children and the cooking, and nobody knows better than me that the place for ma to be happy is with you in her own home and her own ways of doing.'"

"I call that a nerve for a sister to let herself out like that."

"It's not nerve, Clara; it's the truth. Ruby's a good girl in her way."

"What about you--ain't your life to be thought of? Ain't it enough she was married off with enough money for her husband to buy a half-interest in a ladies' ready-to-wear store out there?"

"Why, if I was to bring my little wife to that flat of ours, Clara, or any other kind further down-town that she'd want to pick out for herself, I think my mother would just walk on her hands and knees to

make things pleasant for her. Maybe you don't know it, but on your Wednesday nights up at the house, she is up at five o'clock in the morning fixing around and cooking the things she thinks you'll like."

"I'm not saying a word against your mother, Sam. I think she's a grand woman, and I admire a fellow that's good to his mother. I always say, 'Give me a fellow every time that is good to his mother and that fellow will be good to his wife.'"

"I'm not pretending to say ma mayn't be a little peculiar in her ways, but you never saw an old person that wasn't, did you? Neither am I saying it's exactly any girl's idea to start out married life with a third person in--"

"I've always sworn to myself, Sam, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, that if I can't marry to improve myself, I'm going to stay single till I can. I'm not a six-dollar-a-week stenog that has to marry for enough to eat. I can afford to buy a seventy-five dollar suit every winter of my life and twelve-dollar shoes every time I need them. The hat on my head cost me eighteen-fifty wholesale, without having to be beholding to nobody, and--"

"Ma don't mean those things, Clara. It's just when she hears the price girls pay for things nowadays she can't help being surprised the way things have changed."

"I'm not a small potato, Sam. I never could live like a small potato."

"Why, you know there's nothing I like better than to see you dressed in the best that money can buy. You heard what I said about that hat just now, didn't you? Whatever it cost, it's worth it. I can afford to dress my little wife in the best that comes. There's nothing too good for her."

"Yes; but--"

"All ma needs, Clara, is a little humoring. She's had to stint so all her life, it's a little hard to get her used to a little prosperity. Take me. Why, if I bring her home a little shawl or a pockabook that cost, say, ten dollars, you think I tell her? No. I say, 'Here's a bargain I picked up for three ninety-eight,' and right away she's happy with something reduced."

"Your mother and me, Sam, and, mind you, I'm not saying she isn't a grand old lady, wasn't no more made to live together than we was made to fly. I couldn't no more live her way than she could live mine. I've got

a practical head on my shoulders--I don't deny it--and I want to improve ourselves in this world when we marry, and have an up-to-date home like every young couple that starts out nowadays."

"Sure, we--"

"That flat of yours up there or any other one under the conditions would be run like the ark. I'm an up-to-date girl, I am. There's not a girl living would be willing to marry a well-off fellow like you and go huck herself in a place she couldn't even have the running of herself or have her own say-so about the purse-strings. It may sound unbecoming, but when I marry I'm going to better myself, I am."

"I--why--"

"If she can't even stand for her own son-in-law walking into his own kitchen in his own house--Oh, you don't find me starting my married life that way at this late date. I haven't held off five years for that."

Mr. Lipkind pushed back his but slightly tasted food, lines of strain and a certain whiteness out in his face. "It--it just seems awful, Clara, this going around in a circle and not getting anywheres."

"I'm at the end of my rope, I am."

"I see your point in a way, Clara, but, my God! a man's mother is his mother! It's eating up my life just as it's eating yours, but what you going to do about it? It just seems the best years of our life are going, waiting for God knows what."

Hands clasped until her finger-nails whitened, Miss Bloom leaned across the table, her voice careful and concentrated. "Now you said something! That's why you and me are here alone together to-night. There's not going to be a sixth year of this kind of waiting between us. Things have got to come to a head. I've got a chance, Sam, to marry. Eddie Leonard has asked me."

"I--thought so."

"Eddie Leonard ain't a Sam Lipkind, but after the war his five-thousand-dollar job is down at Arnstein's waiting for him, and he's got a good stiff bank-account saved as good as yours and--and no strings to it. I believe in a girl facing those facts the same as any other facts. Why, I--this war and all--why, if anything was to happen to you to-morrow--us unmarried this way--I'd be left high and dry without so

much as a penny to show for the best five years of my life. We've got to do one thing or another, Sam. I believe in a girl being practical as well as romantic."

"I--see your point, Clara."

"I'm done with going around in this circle of ours."

"You mean--"

"You know what I mean."

The lower half of Mr. Lipkind's face seemed to lock, as it were, into a kind of rigidity which shot out his lower jaw. "I'll see Eddie Leonard burning like brimstone before I let him have you!"

"Well?"

"God! I don't know what to say--I don't know what to say!"

"That's your trouble, Sam; you're so chicken-hearted you--"

"My father died when I was five, Clara, and no matter what my feelings are to you, there's no power on earth can make me quit having to be him as well as a son to my mother. Maybe it sounds softy to you--but if I got to pay with her happiness for--ours--then I never want happiness to the day I die."

"In other words, it's the mother first."

"Don't put it that way--it's her--age--first. It ain't what she wants and don't want; it's what she's got to have. My mother couldn't live away from me."

"She could if you were called to war."

There was something electric in the silence that followed, something that seemed to tighten the gaze of each for the other.

"But I haven't been--yet."

"The next draft will get you."

"Maybe."

"Well, what'll you do then?"

"That's something me and ma haven't ever discussed. The war hasn't been mentioned in our house for two years--except that the letters don't come from Germany, and that's a grief to her. There's enough time for her to cross that bridge when we come to it. She worries about it enough."

"If I was a man I'd enlist, I would!"

"I'd give my right hand to. Every other night I dream I'm a lieutenant."

"Why, there's not a fellow I know that hasn't beaten the draft to it and enlisted for the kind of service he wants. I know a half a dozen who have got in the home guard and things and have saved themselves by volunteering from being sent to France."

"I wouldn't dodge the front thataway. I'd like to enlist as a private and then work myself up to lieutenant and then on up to captain and get right into the fray on the front. I--"

"You bet, if I was a fellow, I'd enlist for the kind of home service I wanted--that's what Eddie and all the fellows are doing."

"So would I, Clara, if I was what you call a--free man. There's nobody given it more thought than me."

"Well, then, why don't you? Talk's cheap."

"You know why, Clara, to get back to going around in a circle again."

"But you've got to go, sooner or later. You've got a comfortable married sister and independent circumstances of your own to keep your mother; you haven't got a chance for exemption."

"I don't want exemption."

"Well, then, beat the draft to it."

"I--Most girls ain't so anxious to--to get rid of their best fellows, Clara."

"Silly! Can't you see the point? If--if you'd enlist and go off to camp, I--I could go and live near you there like Birdie Harberger does her husband. See?"

"You mean--"

"Then--God forbid anything should happen to you!--I'm your wife. You see, Sam?"

"Why, Clara--"

"You see what I mean. But nothing can happen this way, because if you try to enlist in some mechanical department where they need you in this country--you see, Sam? See?"

"I--see."

"Your mother would have to get used to things then, Sam--it would be the easiest for her. An old lady like her couldn't go trailing around the outskirts of a camp like your wife could. Think of the comfort it'll be to her to have me with you if she can't be. She'll get so used to--living alone--"

"I--You mustn't talk that way to me, Clara. When I'm called to serve my country, I'm the first one that will want to go. I've given more money already than I can afford to help the boys who are at the front. So far as I'm concerned, enlisting like this with--with you--around, would be the happiest thing ever happened to me, but--well, you see for yourself."

"You mean, then, you won't?"

"I mean, Clara, I can't."

She was immediately level of tone again and pushed back, placing her folded napkin beside her place, patting it down.

"Well, then, Sam, I'm done."

"'Done,' Clara?"

"Yep. That lets me out. I've given you every chance to make this thing possible. Your mother is no better and no different than thousands and thousands of other mothers who are giving their sons, only, she is better off than most, because she's provided for. It's all right for a fellow's mother to come first, maybe, but if his wife isn't even to come second or third or tenth, then it's about time to call quits. I haven't made up my mind to this in a day. I'm done."

"Clara--"

"Ed has asked me. I don't pretend he's my ideal, but he's more concerned

about my future than he is about anybody else's. If I'm ready to leave with him on that twelve-o'clock train for Boston to-morrow, where he's going to be put in the clerical corps at Camp Usonis, we'll be married there to-morrow night, and I'll settle down somewhere near camp as long as I can. He's got a good nest-egg if--God forbid!--anything should happen. That's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"My God! Clara, this is awful! Eddie Leonard he's not your kind; he--"

"I've given you first chance, Sam. That proves how you stand with me. A one! Ace high! First! Nobody can ever take your place with me. Don't be a boob coming and going, Sam; you're one now not to see things and you'll be another one spelled backward if you don't help yourself to your chance when it comes. You've got your life in front of you, and your mother's got hers in back of her. Now choose."

"My God! Clara, this is--terrible! Why--I'd rather be a thousand boobs than take my mother's heart and tear it to pieces."

"You won't?"

"I can't."

"Don't say that, Sam. Go home and--sleep on it. Think it over. Please! Come to your senses, honey. Telephone me at eleven to keep me from catching that twelve-o'clock train. Don't let me take it with Eddie. Think it over, Sam. Honey--our--future--don't throw it away! Don't let me take that twelve-o'clock train!"

There were tears streaming from her eyes, and her lips, so carefully firm, were beginning to tremble. "You can't blame a girl, Sam, for wanting to provide for her future. Can you, Sam? Think it over. Please! I'll be praying when eleven o'clock comes to-morrow morning for you to telephone me. Please, Sam--think!"

He dropped his face low, lower toward the table, trembling under the red wave that surged over him and up into the roots of his hair. "I'll think it over, Clara--my girl--my own girl!"

As if the moments themselves had been woven by her flying amber needles into a whole cloth of meditation, Mrs. Lipkind, beside a kitchen lamp that flowed in gracious light, knitted the long, quiet hours of her evening into fabric, her face screwed and out of repose and occasionally the lips moving. Age is prone to that. Memories love to be mumbled and chewed over--the unconscious kind of articulation which comes with the years and for which youth has a wink and a quirk.



A tiger cat with overfed sides and a stare that seemed to doze purred on the window-ledge, gold and unswerving of eye. The silence was like the singing inside of a shell, and into it rocked Mrs. Lipkind.

By nine o'clock she was already glancing up at the clock, cocking her head to each and every of night's creaks.

By half after nine there were small and frequent periods of peering through cupped hands down into a street so remote that its traffic had neither shape nor identity. Once she went down a long slit of hallway to the front door, opening it and gazing out upon a fog-filled corridor that was papered in embossed leatherette, one speckled incandescent bulb lighting it sadly. There was something impregnable, even terrible to her in the featureless stare of the doors of three adjoining apartments. She tiptoed, almost ran, poor dear! with the consciousness of some one at her heels, back to the kitchen, where at least was the warm print of the cat's presence; fell to knitting again, clacking her needles for the solace of explainable sound.

Identically with the round moment of ten Mr. Lipkind entered, almost running down the hallway.

"Hello, ma! Think I got lost? Just got to talking and didn't realize. Haven't been worried, ma? Afraid?"

She lifted her head from his kiss. "'Afraid!' What you take me for? For why should I be worried at only ten o'clock? Say, I'm glad if you stay out for recreation."

He kissed her again, shaking out of his coat and unwinding his muffler. "I could just see you walking the floor and looking out of the window."

"Sa-y, I been so busy all evening I didn't have time to think. I'm not such a worrier no more like I used to be. Like the saying is--life is too short."

He drew up beside her, lifting her needles off her work. "Little sweetheart mamma, why don't you sit on the big sofa in the front room where it's more comfortable?"

"You can't make, Sammy, out of a pig's ear a silk stocking."

He would detain her hands, his eyes puckered and, so intent upon her.

"You had a good time, Sammy?"

"You'd be surprised, ma, what a nice place Clara boards at."

"What did they have to eat? Good cooking?"

"Not for a fellow that's used to my boarding-house."

"What?"

"I couldn't tell if it was soup or finger-bowls they served for the first course."

"I know--stylish broth. Let me warm you up a little of my thick barley soup that's left over from--"

He pressed her down. "Please, ma! I'm full up. I couldn't. They had pink ice-cream, too, with pink cake and--"

"Such mess-food what is bad for you. I'm surprised how Clara keeps her good complexion. Let me fix you some fried--"

"Ma, I tell you I couldn't. It's ten o'clock. You mustn't try to fatten me up so. In war-time a man has got to be lean."

She sat back suddenly and whitely quiet. "That's--twice already to-day, Sam, you talk like that."

He took up her lax hand, moving each separate finger up and down, eyes lowered. "Why not? Doesn't it ever strike you, mamma, that you and me are--are kidding ourselves along on this war business, pretending to each other there ain't no war?"

She laid a quick hand to her breast. "What you mean, Sammy?"

"Why, you know what I mean, ma. I notice you read the war news pretty closely, all right."

"Sammy, you mean something!"

"Now, ma, there's no need to get excited right away. Think of the mothers who haven't even got bank-accounts whose sons have got to go."

"Sammy--you 'ain't been--"

"No, no; I haven't."

"You have! I can see it in your face! You've come home with some news to break. You been drafted!"

He held her arms to her sides, still pressing her down to her chair. "I tell you I haven't! Can't you take my word for it?"

"Swear to me, Sammy!"

"All right; I swear."

"Swear to me on your dead father who is an angel in heaven!"

"I swear--thataway."

She was still pressing against her breathing. "You're keeping something back. Sammy, is it that we got mail from Germany? From Aunt Carrie? Bad news--O my God!"

"No! No! Who could I get mail from there any more than you've been getting it for the last two years? Mamma, if you're going to be this excitable and get yourself sick, I won't talk over anything with you. I'll quit."

"You got something, Sammy, to break to me. I can read you like a book."

"I'm done. If I can't talk facts over with you without your going to pieces this way, I'm done. I quit."

She clasped her hands, her face pleading up to him. "Sammy, what is it? If you don't tell me, I can't stand it. Sammy?"

"Will you sit quiet and not get excited?"

"Please, Sammy, I will."

"It's this: you see, ma, the way the draft goes. When a fellow's called to war, drafted, he's got to go, no questions asked. But when a fellow enlists for war, volunteers, you see, before the government calls him, then thataway he can pick out for himself the thing he wants to be in the army. Y'see? And then maybe the thing he picks out for himself can keep him right here at home. Y'see, ma--so he don't have to go away. See the point?"

"You mean when a boy enlists he offers himself instead of gets offered."

"Exactly."

"You got something behind all this. You mean you--you want to enlist."

"Now, ma--you see, if I was to enlist--and stay right here in this country--with you near the camp or, as long as it's too rough life for you, with--with Clara there--a woman to look in on--"

"Sammy--you mean it's enlistment!"

Her voice rose in velocity; he could feel her pulse run beneath his fingers.

"It's the best way, ma. The draft is sure to get me. Let me beat it and keep myself home--near you. We might as well face the music, ma. They'll get me one way or another. Let me enlist now, ma. Like a man. Right away. For my country!"

Do you know the eyes of Bellini's "Agony in a Garden"? Can you hear for yourself the note that must have been Cassandra's when she shouted out her forebodings? There were these now in the glance and voice of Mrs. Lipkind as she drew back from him, her face actually seeming to shrivel.

"No, Sammy! No! No! No!"

"Ma--please--"

"You wouldn't! You couldn't! No, Sammy--my son!"

"Ma, for God's sake don't go on so!"

"Then tell me you wouldn't! Against your own flesh and blood! Tell me you wouldn't!"

"No, no, ma! For God's sake, don't take a fit--a stroke--no, no; I wouldn't--I wouldn't!"

"Your own blood, Sammy! Your own baby cousins what I tucked you in bed with--mine own sister's children! Her babies what slept with you. Mine own sister who raised me and worked down her hands to the bone to make it so with my young husband and baby we could come to America--no--no!"

"Mamma, for God's sakes--"

"Three years like a snake here inside of it's eating me--all night--all day--I'm a good American, Sammy; I got so much I should be thankful for to America. Twenty-five years it's my home, the home where I had

prosperity and good treatment, the home where I had happiness with your papa and where he lies buried, but I can't give you to fight against my own, Sammy--to be murdered by your own--my sister what never in her life harmed a bird--my child and her children--cousins--against each other. My beautiful country what I remember with cows and green fields and clover--always the smell of clover. It ain't human to murder against your own flesh and blood for God knows what reason!"

"Mamma, there is a reason it--"

"I tell you I'm a good American, Sammy. For America I give my last cent, but not to stick knives in my own--it ain't human--Why didn't I die before we got war? What good am I here? In my boy's way for his country--his marriage--his happiness--why don't I die?"

"Ma, I tell you you mustn't! You're making yourself sick. Let me fan you. Here, ma, I didn't mean it. See--I'm holding you tight. I won't never let go. You're my little sweetheart mamma. You mustn't tremble like that. I'm holding you tight--tight--little mamma."

"My boy! My little boy! My son! My all! All in their bed together. Three. Her two. Mine. The smell of clover--my boy--Sammy--Sam--" She fainted back into his arms suddenly, very white and very quiet and very shriveled.

He watched beside her bed the next five hours of the night, his face so close above hers that, when she opened her eyes, his were merged into one for her, and the clasp of his hand never left hers.

"You all right, ma? Sure? Sure you don't need the doctor?"

She looked up at him with a tired, a burned-out, an ashamed smile. "The first time in my life, Sammy, such a thing ever happened to me."

He pressed a chain of close kisses to the back of her hand, his voice far from firm. "It was me, ma. I'll never forgive myself. My little mamma, my little mamma sweetheart!"

"I feel fine, son; only, with you sitting here all night, you don't let me sleep for worry that you ain't in bed."

"I love it. I love to sit here by you and watch you sleep. You're sure you've no fever? Sure?"

"I'm well, Sammy. It was nothing but what you call a fainting-fit. For some women it's nothing that they should faint every time they get a

little bit excited. It's nothing. Feel my hands--how cool! That's always a sign--coolness."

He pressed them both to his lips, blowing his warm breath against them.

"There now--go to sleep."

The night-light burning weakly, the great black-walnut bedstead ponderous in the gloom, she lay there mostly smiling and always shamefaced.

"Such a thing should happen to me at my age!"

"Try to sleep, ma."

"Go in your room to bed, and then I get sleep. Do you want your own clerks should beat you to business to-morrow?"

"A little whisky?"

"Go away; you got me dosed up enough with such \_Schnapps\_."

"The light lower?"

"No. If you don't go in your room, I lay here all night with my eyes open, so help me!"

He rose, stiff and sore-kneed, hair awry, and his eyes with the red rims of fatigue. "You'll sure ring the little bell if you want anything, ma?"

"Sure."

"You promise you won't get up to fix breakfast."

"If I don't feel good, I let you fix mine."

"Good night, little sweetheart mamma."

"You ain't--mad at me, Sam?"

"Mad! Why, ma, you mustn't ask me a--a thing like that; it just kills me to hear you. Me that's not even fit to black your shoes! Mad at you? Why, I--I--Good night--good--night--ma."

\* \* \* \* \*

At just fifteen minutes before seven, to the pungency of coffee and the harsh sing of water across the hall, Mrs. Lipkind in a fuzzy wrapper the color of her eyes and hair, kissed her son awake.

"Sam! Sammy! Get up! \_Thu, thu\_! I can't get him up in the morning!"

The snuggle away and into the crotch of his elbow.

"Sam-my--quarter to seven!"

He sprang up then, haggard, but in a flood of recollection and remorse. "Ma, I must 'a' dropped off at the last minute. You all right? What are you doing up? Go right back! Didn't I tell you not to get up?"

"I been up an hour already; that's how fine I feel. Get up, Sammy; it's late."

He flung on his robe, trying to withdraw her from the business of looping back the bed-clothing over the footboard and pounding into the pillows.

"I tell you I won't have it! You got to lay in bed this morning."

"I'm all right, Sammy. Wouldn't I say so if I wasn't?" But she sat down rather weakly on the edge of the bed, holding the right side of her, breathing too hard.

"I--I shouldn't have beat that pillow is all. Let me get my breathing. I'm all right." Nevertheless, she let him relax her to his pillow, draw the covers down from the footboard, and cover her.

"This settles it," he said, quietly. "I'm going to get a doctor."

She caught his hand. "If--if you want to get me excited for sure, just you call a doctor--now--before I talk with you a minute--I want to talk--I'm all right, Sammy, if you let me talk to you. One step to that telephone, and I get excited--"

"Please, ma--"

"Sammy?"

"Yes."

"Will you listen to me and do like I want it?"

"Yes."

"I--been a bad old woman."

"That's right--break my heart."

"I got a brave boy for a son, and I want to make from him a coward."

"Ma--please!"

"I laid saying to myself all night, a mother should have such a son like mine and make things hard for him yet!"

"Please, get it all out of your head--"

"From America what has given to me everything I should hold back my son from fighting for. In war, it ain't your own flesh and blood what counts; it's the flesh and blood of your country--not, Sam? I been thinking only it's my family affair. If God lets be such a terrible thing like war, there is somewhere a good reason for it. I want you to enlist, Sammy, for your country. Not for in an office, but for where they need you. I want you to enlist to get some day to be such a lieutenant and a captain like you used to play it with tin soldiers. I want--"

"Mamma, mamma, you know you don't mean it!"

"I want it, I tell you. All night I worked on it how dumb I've been, not right away to see it--last night. With Clara near you in the camp--"

"Ma, I didn't mean it that way; I--"

"Clara near you for a woman to look in on, I been so dumb not to right away see it. I'm glad you let it out, Sam. I wouldn't take five thousand dollars it didn't happen--I feel fine--I want it--I--"

"I didn't mean it, ma--I swear! Don't rub it in this way--please--please--"

"Why, I never wanted anything in my life like I want this, Sammy--that you should enlist--a woman to look in on--I been a bad woman, Sammy, I--I--oh--"

It was then that Mr. Lipkind tore to the telephone, his hands so frenzied that they would not properly hold the receiver.



At eight o'clock, and without even a further word, Mrs. Lipkind breathed out quietly, a little tiredly, and yet so eloquent of eye. To her son, pleading there beside her for the life she had not left to give, it was as if the swollen bosom of some stream were carrying her rapidly but gently down its surface, her gaze back at him and begging him to stay the current.

"Mamma! Darling! Doctor--please--for God's sakes--please--she wants something---she can't say it--give it to her! Try to make her tell me what she wants--she wants something--this is terrible--don't let her want something--mamma--just one word to me--try--try--O my God--Doctor--"

A black arm then reached down to withdraw him from the glazed stare which had begun to set in from the pillow.

By ten o'clock a light snow had set in, blowing almost horizontally across the window-pane. He sat his second hour there in a rather forward huddle beside the drawn shade of that window, the *sotto-voce* comings and goings, all the black-coated *parvenus* that follow the wake of death, moving about him. A clock shaped like a pilot's wheel, a boyhood property which had marked the time of twenty years, finally chimed the thin, tin stroke of eleven and after a swimming, nebulous interval, twelve. He glanced up each time with his swollen eyes, and then almost automatically out to the wall telephone in the hall opposite the open door. But he did not move. In fact, for two more hours sat there impervious to proffered warmth of word or deed. Meanwhile, the snow behind the drawn shade had turned to rain that beat and washed against the pane.

Just so the iciness that had locked Samuel Lipkind seemed suddenly to melt in a tornado of sobs that swept him, felled him into a prostration of the terrible tears that men weep.

At a training-camp--somewhere--from his side of a tent that had flapped like a captive wing all through a wind-swept night, Lieutenant Lipkind stirred rather painfully for a final snuggle into the crotch of an elbow that was stiff with chill and night damp.

Out over the peaked city that had been pitched rather than built, and on beyond over the frozen stubble of fields, sounded the bugle-cry of the reveille, which shrills so potently:

I can't get 'em up; I can't get 'em up;  
I can't get 'em up in the morn—ing!

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**THE MODEL MILLIONAIRE**, by Oscar Wilde  
from *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* EBook #773

Unless one is wealthy there is no use in being a charming fellow. Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed. The poor should be practical and prosaic. It is better to have a permanent income than to be fascinating. These are the great truths of modern life which Hughie Erskine never realised. Poor Hughie! Intellectually, we must admit, he was not of much importance. He never said a brilliant or even an ill-natured thing in his life. But then he was wonderfully good-looking, with his crisp brown hair, his clear-cut profile, and his grey eyes. He was as popular with men as he was with women and he had every accomplishment except that of making money. His father had bequeathed him his cavalry sword and a History of the Peninsular War in fifteen volumes. Hughie hung the first over his looking-glass, put the second on a shelf between Ruff's Guide and Bailey's Magazine, and lived on two hundred a year that an old aunt allowed him. He had tried everything. He had gone on the Stock Exchange for six months; but what was a butterfly to do among bulls and bears? He had been a tea-merchant for a little longer, but had soon tired of pekoe and souchong. Then he had tried selling dry sherry. That did not answer; the sherry was a little too dry. Ultimately he became nothing, a delightful, ineffectual young man with a perfect profile and no profession.

To make matters worse, he was in love. The girl he loved was Laura Merton, the daughter of a retired Colonel who had lost his temper and his digestion in India, and had never found either of them again. Laura adored him, and he was ready to kiss her shoe-strings. They were the handsomest couple in London, and had not a penny-piece between them. The Colonel was very fond of Hughie, but would not hear of any engagement.

'Come to me, my boy, when you have got ten thousand pounds of your own, and we will see about it,' he used to say; and Hughie looked very glum in those days, and had to go to Laura for consolation.

One morning, as he was on his way to Holland Park, where the Mertons lived, he dropped in to see a great friend of his, Alan Trevor. Trevor was a painter. Indeed, few people escape that nowadays. But he was also an artist, and artists are rather rare. Personally he was a strange rough fellow, with a freckled face and a red ragged beard. However, when he took up the brush he was a real master, and

his pictures were eagerly sought after. He had been very much attracted by Hughie at first, it must be acknowledged, entirely on account of his personal charm. 'The only people a painter should know,' he used to say, 'are people who are bete and beautiful, people who are an artistic pleasure to look at and an intellectual repose to talk to. Men who are dandies and women who are darlings rule the world, at least they should do so.' However, after he got to know Hughie better, he liked him quite as much for his bright, buoyant spirits and his generous, reckless nature, and had given him the permanent entree to his studio.

When Hughie came in he found Trevor putting the finishing touches to a wonderful life-size picture of a beggar-man. The beggar himself was standing on a raised platform in a corner of the studio. He was a wizened old man, with a face like wrinkled parchment, and a most piteous expression. Over his shoulders was flung a coarse brown cloak, all tears and tatters; his thick boots were patched and cobbled, and with one hand he leant on a rough stick, while with the other he held out his battered hat for alms.

'What an amazing model!' whispered Hughie, as he shook hands with his friend.

'An amazing model?' shouted Trevor at the top of his voice; 'I should think so! Such beggars as he are not to be met with every day. A *trouvaille*, mon cher; a living Velasquez! My stars! what an etching Rembrandt would have made of him!'

'Poor old chap!' said Hughie, 'how miserable he looks! But I suppose, to you painters, his face is his fortune?'

'Certainly,' replied Trevor, 'you don't want a beggar to look happy, do you?'

'How much does a model get for sitting?' asked Hughie, as he found himself a comfortable seat on a divan.

'A shilling an hour.'

'And how much do you get for your picture, Alan?'

'Oh, for this I get two thousand!'

'Pounds?'

'Guineas. Painters, poets, and physicians always get guineas.'

'Well, I think the model should have a percentage,' cried Hughie, laughing; 'they work quite as hard as you do.'

'Nonsense, nonsense! Why, look at the trouble of laying on the paint alone, and standing all day long at one's easel! It's all very well, Hughie, for you to talk, but I assure you that there are moments when Art almost attains to the dignity of manual labour. But you mustn't chatter; I'm very busy. Smoke a cigarette, and keep quiet.'

After some time the servant came in, and told Trevor that the framemaker wanted to speak to him.

'Don't run away, Hughie,' he said, as he went out, 'I will be back in a moment.'

The old beggar-man took advantage of Trevor's absence to rest for a moment on a wooden bench that was behind him. He looked so forlorn and wretched that Hughie could not help pitying him, and felt in his pockets to see what money he had. All he could find was a sovereign and some coppers. 'Poor old fellow,' he thought to himself, 'he wants it more than I do, but it means no hansoms for a fortnight'; and he walked across the studio and slipped the sovereign into the beggar's hand.

The old man started, and a faint smile flitted across his withered lips. 'Thank you, sir,' he said, 'thank you.'

Then Trevor arrived, and Hughie took his leave, blushing a little at what he had done. He spent the day with Laura, got a charming scolding for his extravagance, and had to walk home.

That night he strolled into the Palette Club about eleven o'clock, and found Trevor sitting by himself in the smoking-room drinking hock and seltzer.

'Well, Alan, did you get the picture finished all right?' he said, as he lit his cigarette.

'Finished and framed, my boy!' answered Trevor; 'and, by the bye, you have made a conquest. That old model you saw is quite devoted to you. I had to tell him all about you--who you are, where you live, what your income is, what prospects you have--'

'My dear Alan,' cried Hughie, 'I shall probably find him waiting for

me when I go home. But of course you are only joking. Poor old wretch! I wish I could do something for him. I think it is dreadful that any one should be so miserable. I have got heaps of old clothes at home--do you think he would care for any of them? Why, his rags were falling to bits.'

'But he looks splendid in them,' said Trevor. 'I wouldn't paint him in a frock coat for anything. What you call rags I call romance. What seems poverty to you is picturesqueness to me. However, I'll tell him of your offer.'

'Alan,' said Hughie seriously, 'you painters are a heartless lot.'

'An artist's heart is his head,' replied Trevor; 'and besides, our business is to realise the world as we see it, not to reform it as we know it. A chacun son metier. And now tell me how Laura is. The old model was quite interested in her.'

'You don't mean to say you talked to him about her?' said Hughie.

'Certainly I did. He knows all about the relentless colonel, the lovely Laura, and the 10,000 pounds.'

'You told that old beggar all my private affairs?' cried Hughie, looking very red and angry.

'My dear boy,' said Trevor, smiling, 'that old beggar, as you call him, is one of the richest men in Europe. He could buy all London to-morrow without overdrawing his account. He has a house in every capital, dines off gold plate, and can prevent Russia going to war when he chooses.'

'What on earth do you mean?' exclaimed Hughie.

'What I say,' said Trevor. 'The old man you saw to-day in the studio was Baron Hausberg. He is a great friend of mine, buys all my pictures and that sort of thing, and gave me a commission a month ago to paint him as a beggar. *Que voulez-vous? La fantaisie d'un millionnaire!* And I must say he made a magnificent figure in his rags, or perhaps I should say in my rags; they are an old suit I got in Spain.'

'Baron Hausberg!' cried Hughie. 'Good heavens! I gave him a sovereign!' and he sank into an armchair the picture of dismay.

'Gave him a sovereign!' shouted Trevor, and he burst into a roar of

laughter. 'My dear boy, you'll never see it again. Son affaire c'est l'argent des autres.'

'I think you might have told me, Alan,' said Hughie sulkily, 'and not have let me make such a fool of myself.'

'Well, to begin with, Hughie,' said Trevor, 'it never entered my mind that you went about distributing alms in that reckless way. I can understand your kissing a pretty model, but your giving a sovereign to an ugly one--by Jove, no! Besides, the fact is that I really was not at home to-day to any one; and when you came in I didn't know whether Hausberg would like his name mentioned. You know he wasn't in full dress.'

'What a duffer he must think me!' said Hughie.

'Not at all. He was in the highest spirits after you left; kept chuckling to himself and rubbing his old wrinkled hands together. I couldn't make out why he was so interested to know all about you; but I see it all now. He'll invest your sovereign for you, Hughie, pay you the interest every six months, and have a capital story to tell after dinner.'

'I am an unlucky devil,' growled Hughie. 'The best thing I can do is to go to bed; and, my dear Alan, you mustn't tell any one. I shouldn't dare show my face in the Row.'

'Nonsense! It reflects the highest credit on your philanthropic spirit, Hughie. And don't run away. Have another cigarette, and you can talk about Laura as much as you like.'

However, Hughie wouldn't stop, but walked home, feeling very unhappy, and leaving Alan Trevor in fits of laughter.

The next morning, as he was at breakfast, the servant brought him up a card on which was written, 'Monsieur Gustave Naudin, de la part de M. le Baron Hausberg.' 'I suppose he has come for an apology,' said Hughie to himself; and he told the servant to show the visitor up.

An old gentleman with gold spectacles and grey hair came into the room, and said, in a slight French accent, 'Have I the honour of addressing Monsieur Erskine?'

Hughie bowed.

'I have come from Baron Hausberg,' he continued. 'The Baron--'

'I beg, sir, that you will offer him my sincerest apologies,'  
stammered Hughie.

'The Baron,' said the old gentleman with a smile, 'has commissioned me to bring you this letter'; and he extended a sealed envelope.

On the outside was written, 'A wedding present to Hugh Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar,' and inside was a cheque for 10,000 pounds.

When they were married Alan Trevor was the best man, and the Baron made a speech at the wedding breakfast.

'Millionaire models,' remarked Alan, 'are rare enough; but, by Jove, model millionaires are rarer still!'

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**THE CALL OF THE RACE**, by Elizabeth Cooper  
from *Prairie Gold* EBook #39957

It was the last day of September, the maple trees were turning to red and gold, the mist of purple haze was in the air, and all Japan was going to the parks and woods to revel in the colors they loved so well.

Three men came out of the American Embassy, and looked for a moment over the roofs below them, half conscious of the beauty of this autumn time. They chatted for a few moments, then one of them motioned to a servant to put his mail bag in the jinrickshaw and slowly stepping into the tiny carriage he was whirled away.

The other men watched him for a few moments in silence, then as they turned to go to the English club, the elder shook his head slowly as he rather viciously bit the end from his cigar.

"Freeman's made a big fool of himself," he said. "Nice man, too."

The younger man looked after the fast disappearing jinrickshaw and asked after a moment's hesitation:

"He's married a Jap, hasn't he? I'm new here but I have heard something about him that's queer."

"Yes," the Ambassador replied. "Married her, preacher, ring, the whole thing."

"How did it happen? Why did he \_marry\_ her?" the younger man asked with a laugh.

"We all talked to him. I talked to him like a father, but he wouldn't listen to reason. Saw her at the mission school, fell head and heels in love with her and wouldn't take anyone's advice. Even the missionary was against it. Told him that mixed marriages never came out right; that the girl always reverted to type," said the Ambassador a little bitterly.

"Well, has it turned out as they predicted?" inquired the secretary interestedly.

"Well, no," admitted the Ambassador. "It's been two years, and everything seems to be all right so far. No one ever sees much of



either of them. You meet her with him once in a while in some garden admiring the wistaria, or the lotus. She's a beauty--a real beauty--and belongs to one of the old Samurai families up north somewhere."

"How did the mission get her? I thought they went in more for the lower classes," asked the secretary.

"Well, it seems that some missionary up north saw her and was attracted by her cleverness and her pretty face, and she persuaded the girl's parents to send her to school here. They're as poor as Job's turkey; but they live in a great old palace and observe all the old time Jap customs. Haven't changed a bit for centuries. The real thing in old-time aristocracy. But the missionary got past them some way and the girl came down--when was it?--six years ago, I think. Missionary says she's clever, has become a Christian, and evidently forgotten that she's a Jap."

"It'll perhaps be the exception that proves that all mixed marriages are not failures," said the optimistic secretary.

"No," said the older man, "I know Japan and the Japanese. There's something in them that never changes--the call of the blood or whatever it is. No matter how much education they have, change of religion, life in foreign countries--anything--they're Japanese, and in a crisis they go back to their gods and the instincts of their race. We all told Freeman this--the missionary, myself, everybody took a hit at him when we found he really meant business, but he only laughed. He said Yuki was as European as he was. Never thought of the gods, hardly remembered her people, and all that rot. He ought to know better: this is his second post in Japan. Was out here twelve years ago and got in some kind of trouble. I was surprised when the government sent him back; but I suppose they thought it had all blown over, and I presume it has, although the Japs don't forget."

The Ambassador was quiet for a few moments, then he said:

"No, I don't believe at all in intermarriage between the Oriental and the Occidental. Their traditions, customs, everything is different. They have no common meeting ground, and that racial instinct, that inherent something is stronger in the Oriental than in the Westerner. A woman here in this country, for example, is taught from babyhood that she must obey her parents, her clan, \_absolutely\_. Her family is first, and she must sacrifice her life if necessary for them, and they will go to any lengths in this obedience. I told this to Freeman, everyone did, but he just gave his happy laugh, and said that his

wife-to-be was no more Japanese in feeling and sentiment than he was--that she had outgrown the old religion, the old beliefs. He laughed at the idea that her family would have any influence over her after she was his wife. Yet--I know these people--and have always been a little worried----"

The two men chatted until they entered the doors of the English club.

Morris Freeman with his fast runner was drawn swiftly through the modern streets of new Japan, then more slowly through the little alleys, where the shops were purely native. Finally he drew up at an entrance and stopped under the tiny roof of a gateway. He had been expected, evidently, because no sooner had he stopped than the great gate was swung open and a smiling servant stood in the entrance. Freeman handed him the mail bag and said:

"Tell the Ok San that I will be back in about an hour," and was taken swiftly up the street. The coolie at the gate was still watching the disappearing jinrickshaw when a Japanese approached, and bowing to the servant asked: "Is your mistress within?" The servant answered in the affirmative, looking at him interestedly, as he was different from the average man one sees in Tokio. He was dressed in an old-time costume that immediately told the city-bred servant that the man was from some distant province.

The visitor went to the veranda, dropped his clogs, and entered the doorway. A young girl was kneeling before a koto lightly strumming its strings and did not hear the entrance of the man. He stood for a moment looking around the room; then he saw Yuki and walking over to her sat down facing her. Yuki stared at him first in astonishment; then a look of fear came into her black eyes. He was silent for many minutes, then he coolly remarked:

"You do not speak to your uncle. You do not care to make me welcome in this your home." He looked down at her contemptuously.

She saluted him, touching her head to her folded hands upon the floor. After a few polite phrases she rose, went to the hibachi, fanned the flame a moment, poured water from the kettle into the teapot, and brought a tiny tray on which was a cup and the pot of tea. She poured out the tea, and, taking the cup in both hands, slid it across the floor to him; when he took it, she again touched her head to the floor, and inquired:

"I trust my honorable Uncle is in the enjoyment of good health?"

The man sipped the tea slowly, gazing around the room, taking in all its details. His eyes especially rested upon the shrine in the corner. Then he regarded her long and intently.

"I see you have brought your family shrine to the house of the foreigner with whom you live--the man who has made you forget your people. Have you opened it; do you offer the daily incense; or is it simply an article of furniture for your foreign husband to admire?"

Yuki said nothing; she could not explain to this old man that the shrine had meant nothing to her, but having come from her old home she had kept it simply as a remembrance of the past.

Not receiving an answer the man continued:

"The foreigner is kind to you?"

Yuki smiled and said softly to herself: "Kind--kind--my Dana San." Then seeing her uncle expected an answer, she said in a quiet tone:

"Most kind, my honorable Uncle."

"You wonder why I come to you to-night?" he inquired.

Yuki took the tea-things and put them behind her, then remarked:

"My humble house is honored by your presence."

"Honored, yes," sneered the uncle. "But still you wonder. I will tell you why I came to you to-night. Once upon a time there was a family in Japan--happy, honored--proud of their title, of their history--and, more than all, proud of their overlord. He was impetuous, and like many of the older Japanese, resentful of the foreigner's intrusion. Here, one day on a visit to his capital, he met a stranger, one of that hated race who spoke slightly of his country, of his gods. There was the quick retort, the blow, and he our lord went to the Land of Shadows. The evil gods of the foreigner protected the man who gave the blow. His name was never discovered--it was claimed he did the cowardly act in self-defense and he got safely away."

Yuki leaned forward eagerly.

"Oh, it is of my honorable father you speak?"

"Yes, it is of your father I speak," said the man in a low, bitter voice. "Since his death the gods have not favored our house; we have

lost position, money, everything. But at last--at last our prayers to the gods have been answered. The enemy of our house is delivered into our hands--into your hands."

Yuki looked bewildered.

"My hands? What do you mean, my honorable Uncle?"

"Yuki San, we have learned the name of the man who struck your father!" he exclaimed in a low, tense voice.

Yuki looked at the tragic face before her a moment, then she said: "At last, at last you know?"

"Yes," replied her uncle. "At last, after all these years of patience, revenge is in our hands. Oh, Yuki San, the foreigner, your husband, is the man who killed your father."

Yuki drew back, her face pallid, her body trembling.

"Morris, my Dana San?"

"Yes, your Dana San."

Yuki sat for a moment in bewilderment, then the color came back to her face and she leaned forward eagerly.

"But, my lord, my lord, he could not have done it! He is so kind, so good, he never hurt a thing in all his life."

The man leaned forward, gazing intently into her eyes.

"Has this stranger made you forget your father? Have you forgotten your oath, your oath? Have you forgotten why your father is now in the Land of Shadows?" He pointed to the shrine.

"Look, there is his tablet within that shrine. But the doors are closed. In our home, in our family temple are tablets. The doors of the shrines have never been opened. His spirit has not had the incense to help him on the way. The morning offering has not been his. He has been compelled to travel alone on the way to the gods, because we, his family--you and I--have not avenged his death.

"No, do not speak," he continued, as Yuki was about to interrupt. "He was murdered, and until the man who sent him on his way joins him in his journey, his spirit can have no peace. And you, his daughter, dare

not, for fear of the gods, open the shrine to make the offering that the poorest peasant makes to his dead! But to-night I bring you the final word of the clan. To give you the honor of doing the deed that will wash the stain from our name. You know that a servant must avenge the death of his master, a son that of his father, a Samurai the death of his overlord, and I come to give you--a girl, an inheritance that will make you envied of men."

"I do not understand--my lord, you mean----"

"Yuki San, he killed your father, the head of our house, and he must die to-night."

Yuki rose and went to the man. Taking him by the arms she looked up into his face piteously, with wide, frightened eyes.

"My lord, my lord, you can not mean it--that he shall die--Morris die!"

The old man looked down into the pale face, the searching, pitiful eyes; but there shone no mercy in the hard eyes that met the ones raised pleadingly to his.

"Yes, and you, the only child of the man he killed, shall fulfill the sacred oath, and bring peace to your father's honorable soul."

Yuki was utterly bewildered and said falteringly: "I do not understand--I do not understand."

With the monotonous voice of the fatalist the uncle continued:

"It would have been better if a man-child had been born to our lord, as his arm would not falter; but you will take as sure a way, if not as honorable as the sword. Here is the means." He drew a little bottle from the sleeve of his kimono. "A little of this and he sleeps instantly and well."

Yuki held out her hands to the man sitting like fate before her.

"My lord, how can I? We have been so happy! My Dana San has never given me an unkind look, never caused me a moment's sorrow. I love him, Uncle, not as a Japanese woman loves her lord, but as a foreign woman from over the seas loves the man whom she has chosen from all the world. For two years we have been in this little house, for two years he has been my every breath. My first thought in the morning was for Morris, my Dana San, my last thought at night was joy in the

thought that I was his and that he loved me. Sometimes I waken and look at him, and wonder how such a great man can care for such a simple Japanese girl as I am. And now you ask me to hurt him?" She drew her head up proudly. "I can not and I will not. He is my husband, and no matter what he has done I will protect him--even from you."

The man rose, and striding to her, grasped her roughly by the arm.

"Woman, you will do as we say. You are a Japanese and you know even unto death you must obey. I have no fear. It will be done--and by you--to-night."

He released her arm, and she, looking down upon the tatami, moved her foot silently to and fro, absorbed with this tragedy that had come into her happy life. Then she had a thought that brought hope to her, and she looked up eagerly. "Perhaps it is not true--perhaps it was not really Morris----"

"Listen," said the man roughly. "It was he. We \_know\_. But you--if you do not believe--make him confess to-night. If it was not he, then you are free. If it is, you will know what to do--and it will be done to-night--remember."

Yuki looked into the hard black eyes staring at her, fascinating her, taking all the life from her, and she said slowly as if under a spell:

"Yes--if he confesses--if it was he--I know it will be done. But--if the gods take him, they will also take me."

The uncle shook her roughly by the arm.

"\_No!\_ Listen to me. Your work is not yet done. You must live. It would be too much happiness to have your spirit travel with him the lonely road. He must walk the path alone, without love to guide him. You will return to me to-night, return to your home and family who await you. Our vengeance would be only half complete if we allowed you to journey to the Land of Shadows with him. Come to me--" and he drew her to him. "Look at me. I will await you at the Willow Tea House."

He took her face in his hands and gazed steadily into her eyes, saying in a low, tense voice:

"I do not fear--you will obey. Are you not a Japanese? I expect--you--to--come--to--me--after your work is done--and the gods will be with you. Sayonara."

He put on his clogs at the entrance and went away, his form scarcely distinguishable in the gloom as he went down the pathway. Yuki looked after him, then threw herself on her face on the floor with a little moan, beating her hands in the manner of an Eastern woman.

It was absolutely quiet in the room, no noise coming from the street outside, except from a far distance a woman's voice chanting in a tone of singular sweetness words that sounded in their minor key like the soft tones of a flute: "\_ Amma Konitchi Wahyak Mo\_", then between these sweet calls a plaintive whistle--one long-drawn note, then two shorter ones--the cry of the blind massage woman, making her rounds for her evening's toil.

The cry died away, and only the low moan was heard within the little room. Morris opened the gate and came lightly up the pathway, whistling a few bars of the latest popular song. He came inside the room, and, hardly able to distinguish the objects, looked about wondering, then seeing Yuki lying where she had thrown herself, he went over to her and picked her up.

"My sweetheart, what is it? What has happened?" He sat down upon the long chair and held her against him. "Tell me, dear one, tell me."

Morris went over to the lamp after a few moments and lighted it, then came back and showed Yuki a little gift he had brought her. She took it and looked at it with eyes filled with tragic grief; then, pressing it against her face, put her head on his shoulder and began sobbing in a heart-broken way that amazed Morris.

She lay with her face hidden, he softly caressing her hair. Finally she said:

"Morris, we have been here two years. Tell me--have I made you happy?"

Morris threw back his head and laughed happily.

"Happy, Yuki, happy? Dear heart, I had a long time ago put aside the thought that love meant happiness and happiness meant love. Now you have taught me that one cannot exist without the other. I love you, I live with you, you are mine. That tells everything. When you came into my life, into my heart, I was soured and embittered. Life meant only work and duties done; after that, comfort and a cigar--that was all. But now, I love my work as well, I do it as thoroughly, but there is something more. I know when I shut the office-door, I can come here where no one can enter. I can be alone with the woman I love and who loves me. There is no question of society or dinners, but just us two

alone, you and me--and," turning up her face, "you are happy with me, my Yuki San? You love me?"

Yuki did not reply at once. Then in a low, sweet voice she replied:

"Morris, we Japanese women never speak of love. It is to us a subject left to singing girls and geishas. Without it we marry, and without it we live, and it is, unless by chance, a closed book to us. I do not know if I love you as the women of your race love their Dana Sans--I know I think of you by day, and I dream of you by night. I live only for you--to be what you wish me to be--and when you take me in your arms and say, 'My Yuki San, my sweetheart,' it seems to me that my heart with its happiness will break! I do not know if that is love--but if it be--I love you, my Dana San, I love you."

She lay quietly, and he rested his face against her hair, caressing it from time to time. After a silence, he inquired lightly:

"What about supper, Yuki?"

Yuki drew him to her again, for he moved as if he would rise.

"Wait, dear, let us talk a little. Tell me, when you to Tokio came--the first time----"

"Twelve years ago, when O Yuki San was a little girl."

"Twelve years ago--there was much trouble then between foreigners and Japanese. You and your friends--had--had trouble."

Morris looked at her quickly and his eyes darkened.

"Where did you hear that?" he asked.

Yuki, carelessly: "Oh, they gossip in the market-place."

Morris rose and walked up and down the room.

"I don't know what you have heard, but I might as well tell you the whole story. I did have trouble here in Japan. One night some of us got in a mix-up--a sort of quarrel with a Japanese, and I don't know how it happened--I never have known--but I struck and killed him. It was in the dark, and I could hardly see him."

After a silence Yuki stammered: "You--killed him?"



"In self-defense, O Yuki San," Morris defended eagerly; "it was in self-defense. But afterwards, what a time it was! Shall I ever forget that night getting back to my ship?" He passed his hand over his face, and then came back to his place beside her on the couch. "Don't speak of it any more; I don't want to think of it."

Yuki slipped down to the floor and sat there with her head against his knee. She sat very quietly, then finally put her hand up to the flower in her dress and slowly took it out and let it fall to the floor, petal by petal, watching the leaves as they fell. Then, after a long silence, she rose and started towards the tea table, hesitated, went a little way, and then came back to him. She knelt by the couch and said, in a low voice:

"Morris, no matter what happens, what you learn, what the gods may teach you soon--remember, I love you with all the love of my life. That I would give that life for you--oh, so willingly, if I only could! That through whatever you pass, I would gladly be with you; but I will come to you soon. I will not send you where I may not follow. I will come. I am yours, and the gods cannot let you go alone. You need me, and I would not be afraid. I love you--I want to go with you--but I am a Japanese--and I understand."

She let her face fall upon her hands and knelt there quietly. Morris looked at her blankly, thinking she was worried about something. Finally he lifted her face and kissed her.

"Never mind, dear one. I don't know what is troubling you, but of course you shall go with me wherever I go. I need you, and could not be without my Yuki San."

He started to read the papers; she rose and stood by the couch a moment, then taking a step toward the tea-things:

"Would my Dana San--like--a cup of tea?"

Morris, absorbed in his papers, assented. "Why, yes, I don't mind if I do."

She turned and walked slowly to the hibachi, knelt beside it, fanned the fire a moment, then poured the water from the iron kettle into the tiny teapot, let it stand a moment, looking over towards Morris. Then she took the bottle from her sleeve and poured a few drops into the cup, filling it with tea. She rose slowly and walked over to the long chair. She looked down at him as he lay half-reclining, hesitated, then handed him the cup. He took it, and looking up at her half

laughing, exclaimed:

"To you, sweetheart!" and drank.

He fell back on the chair; the cup dropped from his hands. Yuki looked down at him in silence; then she bent over him, and lovingly crossed his hands upon his breast, touched his face caressingly with her fingers; then bent down and kissed him.

She turned slowly, and, in turning, her eyes fell upon the shrine. She looked at it intently, slowly crossed the room and knelt in front of it, bowed her head to the floor; then opened the doors, and bowed her head again.

She took out two candlesticks, two little jars of incense, a small bowl for rice, and another for water. She lighted the candles, lighted the incense, poured water in one bowl and rice in the other. Then she again touched her head to the floor, once--twice--thrice--rose, and walked backward to the open shoji.

She stood a moment looking around the room that she had loved so well; then turned her face to her lover lying so quietly in the chair. She knelt down facing him, touched her head to the floor and rising in the kneeling position, said, stretching out her arms towards Morris:

"Sayonara, my Dana San, good-bye, good-bye."

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**MELMOTH RECONCILED**, by Honore De Balzac  
from *Library of the World's Best Mystery and Detective Stories*  
Edited by Julian Hawthorne, EBook #12758

*To Monsieur le Général Baron de Pommereul, a token of the  
friendship between our fathers, which survives in their sons.*

DE BALZAC.

There is a special variety of human nature obtained in the Social Kingdom by a process analogous to that of the gardener's craft in the Vegetable Kingdom, to wit, by the forcing-house--a species of hybrid which can be raised neither from seed nor from slips. This product is known as the Cashier, an anthropomorphous growth, watered by religious doctrine, trained up in fear of the guillotine, pruned by vice, to flourish on a third floor with an estimable wife by his side and an uninteresting family. The number of cashiers in Paris must always be a problem for the physiologist. Has anyone as yet been able to state correctly the terms of the proportion sum wherein the cashier figures as the unknown  $x$ ? Where will you find the man who shall live with wealth, like a cat with a caged mouse? This man, for further qualification, shall be capable of sitting boxed in behind an iron grating for seven or eight hours a day during seven-eighths of the year, perched upon a cane-seated chair in a space as narrow as a lieutenant's cabin on board a man-of-war. Such a man must be able to defy ankylosis of the knee and thigh joints; he must have a soul above meanness, in order to live meanly; must lose all relish for money by dint of handling it. Demand this peculiar specimen of any creed, educational system, school, or institution you please, and select Paris, that city of fiery ordeals and branch establishment of hell, as the soil in which to plant the said cashier. So be it. Creeds, schools, institutions, and moral systems, all human rules and regulations, great and small, will, one after another, present much the same face that an intimate friend turns upon you when you ask him to lend you a thousand francs. With a dolorous dropping of the jaw, they indicate the guillotine, much as your friend aforesaid will furnish you with the address of the money lender, pointing you to one of the hundred gates by which a man comes to the last refuge of the destitute.

[1] For the narrative "Melmoth the Wanderer," and a description of Balzac's debt to its author, see Volume III, page 161.--EDITOR.

Yet Nature has her freaks in the making of a man's mind; she indulges herself and makes a few honest folk now and again, and now and then a

cashier.

Wherefore, that race of corsairs whom we dignify with the title of bankers, the gentry who take out a license for which they pay a thousand crowns, as the privateer takes out his letters of marque, hold these rare products of the incubations of virtue in such esteem that they confine them in cages in their counting-houses, much as governments procure and maintain specimens of strange beasts at their own charges.

If the cashier is possessed of an imagination or of a fervid temperament; if, as will sometimes happen to the most complete cashier, he loves his wife, and that wife grows tired of her lot, has ambitions, or merely some vanity in her composition, the cashier is undone. Search the chronicles of the counting-house. You will not find a single instance of a cashier attaining a position, as it is called. They are sent to the hulks; they go to foreign parts; they vegetate on a second floor in the Rue Saint-Louis among the market gardens of the Marais. Some day, when the cashiers of Paris come to a sense of their real value, a cashier will be hardly obtainable for money. Still, certain it is that there are people who are fit for nothing but to be cashiers, just as the bent of a certain order of mind inevitably makes for rascality. But, oh marvel of our civilization! Society rewards virtue with an income of a hundred louis in old age, a dwelling on a second floor, bread sufficient, occasional new bandana handkerchiefs, an elderly wife and her offspring.

So much for virtue. But for the opposite course, a little boldness, a faculty for keeping on the windward side of the law, as Turenne outflanked Montecuculli, and Society will sanction the theft of millions, shower ribbons upon the thief, cram him with honors, and smother him with consideration.

Government, moreover, works harmoniously with this profoundly illogical reasoner--Society. Government levies a conscription on the young intelligence of the kingdom at the age of seventeen or eighteen, a conscription of precocious power. Great ability is prematurely exhausted by excessive brain work before it is sent up to be submitted to a process of selection. Nurserymen sort and select seeds in much the same way. To this process the Government brings professional appraisers of talent, men who can assay brains as experts assay gold at the Mint. Five hundred such heads, set afire with hope, are sent up annually by the most progressive portion of the population; and of these the Government takes one third, puts them in sacks called the Écoles, and shakes them up together for three years. Though every one of these young plants represents vast productive power, they are made, as one

may say, into cashiers. They receive appointments; the rank and file of engineers is made up of them; they are employed as captains of artillery; there is no (subaltern) grade to which they may not aspire. Finally, when these men, the pick of the youth of the nation, fattened on mathematics and stuffed with knowledge, have attained the age of fifty years, they have their reward, and receive as the price of their services the third-floor lodging, the wife and family, and all the comforts that sweeten life for mediocrity. If from among this race of dupes there should escape some five or six men of genius who climb the highest heights, is it not miraculous?

This is an exact statement of the relations between Talent and Probity on the one hand, and Government and Society on the other, in an age that considers itself to be progressive. Without this prefatory explanation a recent occurrence in Paris would seem improbable; but preceded by this summing up of the situation, it will perhaps receive some thoughtful attention from minds capable of recognizing the real plague spots of our civilization, a civilization which since 1815 has been moved by the spirit of gain rather than by principles of honor.

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About five o'clock, on a dull autumn afternoon, the cashier of one of the largest banks in Paris was still at his desk, working by the light of a lamp that had been lit for some time. In accordance with the use and wont of commerce, the counting-house was in the darkest corner of the low-ceiled and far from spacious mezzanine floor, and at the very end of a passage lighted only by borrowed lights. The office doors along this corridor, each with its label, gave the place the look of a bath-house. At four o'clock the stolid porter had proclaimed, according to his orders, "The bank is closed." And by this time the departments were deserted, the letters dispatched, the clerks had taken their leave. The wives of the partners in the firm were expecting their lovers; the two bankers dining with their mistresses. Everything was in order.

The place where the strong boxes had been bedded in sheet iron was just behind the little sanctum, where the cashier was busy. Doubtless he was balancing his books. The open front gave a glimpse of a safe of hammered iron, so enormously heavy (thanks to the science of the modern inventor) that burglars could not carry it away. The door only opened at the pleasure of those who knew its password. The letter-lock was a warden who kept its own secret and could not be bribed; the mysterious word was an ingenious realization of the "Open sesame!" in the *Arabian Nights*. But even this was as nothing. A man might discover the password; but unless he knew the lock's final secret, the *ultima*

ratio\_ of this gold-guarding dragon of mechanical science, it discharged a blunderbuss at his head.

The door of the room, the walls of the room, the shutters of the windows in the room, the whole place, in fact, was lined with sheet iron a third of an inch in thickness, concealed behind the thin wooden paneling. The shutters had been closed, the door had been shut. If ever man could feel confident that he was absolutely alone, and that there was no remote possibility of being watched by prying eyes, that man was the cashier of the house of Nucingen and Company in the Rue Saint-Lazare.

Accordingly the deepest silence prevailed in that iron cave. The fire had died out in the stove, but the room was full of that tepid warmth which produces the dull heavy-headedness and nauseous queasiness of a morning after an orgy. The stove is a mesmerist that plays no small part in the reduction of bank clerks and porters to a state of idiocy.

A room with a stove in it is a retort in which the power of strong men is evaporated, where their vitality is exhausted, and their wills enfeebled. Government offices are part of a great scheme for the manufacture of the mediocrity necessary for the maintenance of a Feudal System on a pecuniary basis--and money is the foundation of the Social Contract. (See \_Les Employés\_) The mephitic vapors in the atmosphere of a crowded room contribute in no small degree to bring about a gradual deterioration of intelligences, the brain that gives off the largest quantity of nitrogen asphyxiates the others, in the long run.

The cashier was a man of five and forty or thereabouts. As he sat at the table, the light from a moderator lamp shining full on his bald head and glistening fringe of iron-gray hair that surrounded it--this baldness and the round outlines of his face made his head look very like a ball. His complexion was brick-red, a few wrinkles had gathered about his eyes, but he had the smooth, plump hands of a stout man. His blue cloth coat, a little rubbed and worn, and the creases and shininess of his trousers, traces of hard wear that the clothes-brush fails to remove, would impress a superficial observer with the idea that here was a thrifty and upright human being, sufficient of the philosopher or of the aristocrat to wear shabby clothes. But, unluckily, it is easy to find penny-wise people who will prove weak, wasteful, or incompetent in the capital things of life.

The cashier wore the ribbon of the Legion of Honor at his buttonhole, for he had been a major of dragoons in the time of the Emperor. M. de Nucingen, who had been a contractor before he became a banker, had had reason in those days to know the honorable disposition of his cashier,

who then occupied a high position. Reverses of fortune had befallen the major, and the banker out of regard for him paid him five hundred francs a month. The soldier had become a cashier in the year 1813, after his recovery from a wound received at Studzianka during the Retreat from Moscow, followed by six months of enforced idleness at Strasbourg, whither several officers had been transported by order of the Emperor, that they might receive skilled attention. This particular officer, Castanier by name, retired with the honorary grade of colonel, and a pension of two thousand four hundred francs.

In ten years' time the cashier had completely effaced the soldier, and Castanier inspired the banker with such trust in him, that he was associated in the transactions that went on in the private office behind his little counting-house. The baron himself had access to it by means of a secret staircase. There, matters of business were decided. It was the bolting room where proposals were sifted; the privy council chamber where the reports of the money market were analyzed; circular notes issued thence; and finally, the private ledger and the journal which summarized the work of all the departments were kept there.

Castanier had gone himself to shut the door which opened on to a staircase that led to the parlor occupied by the two bankers on the first floor of their hotel. This done, he had sat down at his desk again, and for a moment he gazed at a little collection of letters of credit drawn on the firm of Watschildine of London. Then he had taken up the pen and imitated the banker's signature upon each. Nucingen he wrote, and eyed the forged signatures critically to see which seemed the most perfect copy.

Suddenly he looked up as if a needle had pricked him. "You are not alone!" a boding voice seemed to cry in his heart; and indeed the forger saw a man standing at the little grated window of the counting-house, a man whose breathing was so noiseless that he did not seem to breathe at all. Castanier looked, and saw that the door at the end of the passage was wide open; the stranger must have entered by that way.

For the first time in his life the old soldier felt a sensation of dread that made him stare open-mouthed and wide-eyed at the man before him; and for that matter, the appearance of the apparition was sufficiently alarming even if unaccompanied by the mysterious circumstances of so sudden an entry. The rounded forehead, the harsh coloring of the long oval face, indicated quite as plainly as the cut of his clothes that the man was an Englishman, reeking of his native isles. You had only to look at the collar of his overcoat, at the voluminous cravat which smothered the crushed frills of a shirt front

so white that it brought out the changeless leaden hue of an impassive face, and the thin red line of the lips that seemed made to suck the blood of corpses; and you could guess at once at the black gaiters buttoned up to the knee, and the half-puritanical costume of a wealthy Englishman dressed for a walking excursion. The intolerable glitter of the stranger's eyes produced a vivid and unpleasant impression, which was only deepened by the rigid outlines of his features. The dried-up, emaciated creature seemed to carry within him some gnawing thought that consumed him and could not be appeased.

He must have digested his food so rapidly that he could doubtless eat continually without bringing any trace of color into his face or features. A tun of Tokay \_vin de succession\_ would not have caused any faltering in that piercing glance that read men's inmost thoughts, nor dethroned the merciless reasoning faculty that always seemed to go to the bottom of things. There was something of the fell and tranquil majesty of a tiger about him.

"I have come to cash this bill of exchange, sir," he said. Castanier felt the tones of his voice thrill through every nerve with a violent shock similar to that given by a discharge of electricity.

"The safe is closed," said Castanier.

"It is open," said the Englishman, looking round the counting-house. "To-morrow is Sunday, and I cannot wait. The amount is for five hundred thousand francs. You have the money there, and I must have it."

"But how did you come in, sir?"

The Englishman smiled. That smile frightened Castanier. No words could have replied more fully nor more peremptorily than that scornful and imperial curl of the stranger's lips. Castanier turned away, took up fifty packets, each containing ten thousand francs in bank notes, and held them out to the stranger, receiving in exchange for them a bill accepted by the Baron de Nucingen. A sort of convulsive tremor ran through him as he saw a red gleam in the stranger's eyes when they fell on the forged signature on the letter of credit.

"It ... it wants your signature ..." stammered Castanier, handing back the bill.

"Hand me your pen," answered the Englishman.

Castanier handed him the pen with which he had just committed forgery. The stranger wrote \_John Melmoth\_, then he returned the slip of paper



and the pen to the cashier. Castanier looked at the handwriting, noticing that it sloped from right to left in the Eastern fashion, and Melmoth disappeared so noiselessly that when Castanier looked up again an exclamation broke from him, partly because the man was no longer there, partly because he felt a strange painful sensation such as our imagination might take for an effect of poison.

The pen that Melmoth had handled sent the same sickening heat through him that an emetic produces. But it seemed impossible to Castanier that the Englishman should have guessed his crime. His inward qualms he attributed to the palpitation of the heart that, according to received ideas, was sure to follow at once on such a "turn" as the stranger had given him.

"The devil take it; I am very stupid. Providence is watching over me; for if that brute had come round to see my gentlemen to-morrow, my goose would have been cooked!" said Castanier, and he burned the unsuccessful attempts at forgery in the stove.

He put the bill that he meant to take with him in an envelope, and helped himself to five hundred thousand francs in French and English bank notes from the safe, which he locked. Then he put everything in order, lit a candle, blew out the lamp, took up his hat and umbrella, and went out sedately, as usual, to leave one of the two keys of the strong room with Madame de Nucingen, in the absence of her husband the baron.

"You are in luck, M. Castanier," said the banker's wife as he entered her room; "we have a holiday on Monday; you can go into the country, or to Soizy."

"Madame, will you be so good as to tell your husband that the bill of exchange on Watschildine, which was behind time, has just been presented? The five hundred thousand francs have been paid; so I shall not come back till noon on Tuesday."

"Good-by, monsieur; I hope you will have a pleasant time."

"The same to you, madame," replied the old dragoon as he went out. He glanced as he spoke at a young man well known in fashionable society at that time, a M. de Rastignac, who was regarded as Madame de Nucingen's lover.

"Madame," remarked this latter, "the old boy looks to me as if he meant to play you some ill turn."

"Pshaw! impossible; he is too stupid."

"Piquoizeau," said the cashier, walking into the porter's room, "what made you let anybody come up after four o'clock?"

"I have been smoking a pipe here in the doorway ever since four o'clock," said the man, "and nobody has gone into the bank. Nobody has come out either except the gentlemen--"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, upon my word and honor. Stay, though, at four o'clock M. Werbrust's friend came, a young fellow from Messrs. du Tillet & Co., in the Rue Joubert."

"All right," said Castanier, and he hurried away.

The sickening sensation of heat that he had felt when he took back the pen returned in greater intensity. "\_Mille diables!\_" thought he, as he threaded his way along the Boulevard de Gand, "haven't I taken proper precautions? Let me think! Two clear days, Sunday and Monday, then a day of uncertainty before they begin to look for me; altogether, three days and four nights' respite. I have a couple of passports and two different disguises; is not that enough to throw the cleverest detective off the scent? On Tuesday morning I shall draw a million francs in London before the slightest suspicion has been aroused. My debts I am leaving behind for the benefit of my creditors, who will put a 'P'[1] on the bills, and I shall live comfortably in Italy for the rest of my days as the Conte Ferraro. I was alone with him when he died, poor fellow, in the marsh of Zembin, and I shall slip into his skin.... \_Mille diables!\_ the woman who is to follow after me might give them a clew! Think of an old campaigner like me infatuated enough to tie myself to a petticoat tail!... Why take her? I must leave her behind. Yes, I could make up my mind to it; but--I know myself--I should be ass enough to go back for her. Still, nobody knows Aquilina. Shall I take her or leave her?"

[1] Protested.

"You will not take her!" cried a voice that filled Castanier with sickening dread. He turned sharply, and saw the Englishman.

"The devil is in it!" cried the cashier aloud.

Melmoth had passed his victim by this time; and if Castanier's first impulse had been to fasten a quarrel on a man who read his own

thoughts, he was so much torn by opposing feelings that the immediate result was a temporary paralysis. When he resumed his walk he fell once more into that fever of irresolution which besets those who are so carried away by passion that they are ready to commit a crime, but have not sufficient strength of character to keep it to themselves without suffering terribly in the process. So, although Castanier had made up his mind to reap the fruits of a crime which was already half executed, he hesitated to carry out his designs. For him, as for many men of mixed character in whom weakness and strength are equally blended, the least trifling consideration determines whether they shall continue to lead blameless lives or become actively criminal. In the vast masses of men enrolled in Napoleon's armies there were many who, like Castanier, possessed the purely physical courage demanded on the battlefield, yet lacked the moral courage which makes a man as great in crime as he could have been in virtue.

The letter of credit was drafted in such terms that immediately on his arrival he might draw twenty-five thousand pounds on the firm of Watschildine, the London correspondents of the house of Nucingen. The London house had been already advised of the draft about to be made upon them; he had written to them himself. He had instructed an agent (chosen at random) to take his passage in a vessel which was to leave Portsmouth with a wealthy English family on board, who were going to Italy, and the passage money had been paid in the name of the Conte Ferraro. The smallest details of the scheme had been thought out. He had arranged matters so as to divert the search that would be made for him into Belgium and Switzerland, while he himself was at sea in the English vessel. Then, by the time that Nucingen might flatter himself that he was on the track of his late cashier, the said cashier, as the Conte Ferraro, hoped to be safe in Naples. He had determined to disfigure his face in order to disguise himself the more completely, and by means of an acid to imitate the scars of smallpox. Yet, in spite of all these precautions, which surely seemed as if they must secure him complete immunity, his conscience tormented him; he was afraid. The even and peaceful life that he had led for so long had modified the morality of the camp. His life was stainless as yet; he could not sully it without a pang. So for the last time he abandoned himself to all the influences of the better self that strenuously resisted.

"Pshaw!" he said at last, at the corner of the Boulevard and the Rue Montmartre, "I will take a cab after the play this evening and go out to Versailles. A post-chaise will be ready for me at my old quartermaster's place. He would keep my secret even if a dozen men were standing ready to shoot him down. The chances are all in my favor, so far as I see; so I shall take my little Naqui with me, and I will go."

"You will not go!" exclaimed the Englishman, and the strange tones of his voice drove all the cashier's blood back to his heart.

Melmoth stepped into a tilbury which was waiting for him, and was whirled away so quickly, that when Castanier looked up he saw his foe some hundred paces away from him, and before it even crossed his mind to cut off the man's retreat the tilbury was far on its way up the Boulevard Montmartre.

"Well, upon my word, there is something supernatural about this!" said he to himself. "If I were fool enough to believe in God, I should think that He had set Saint Michael on my tracks. Suppose that the devil and the police should let me go on as I please, so as to nab me in the nick of time? Did anyone ever see the like! But there, this is folly...."

Castanier went along the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, slackening his pace as he neared the Rue Richer. There, on the second floor of a block of buildings which looked out upon some gardens, lived the unconscious cause of Castanier's crime--a young woman known in the quarter as Mme. de la Garde. A concise history of certain events in the cashier's past life must be given in order to explain these facts, and to give a complete presentment of the crisis when he yielded to temptation.

Mme. de la Garde said that she was a Piedmontese. No one, not even Castanier, knew her real name. She was one of those young girls who are driven by dire misery, by inability to earn a living, or by fear of starvation, to have recourse to a trade which most of them loathe, many regard with indifference, and some few follow in obedience to the laws of their constitution. But on the brink of the gulf of prostitution in Paris, the young girl of sixteen, beautiful and pure as the Madonna, had met with Castanier. The old dragoon was too rough and homely to make his way in society, and he was tired of tramping the boulevard at night and of the kind of conquests made there by gold. For some time past he had desired to bring a certain regularity into an irregular life. He was struck by the beauty of the poor child who had drifted by chance into his arms, and his determination to rescue her from the life of the streets was half benevolent, half selfish, as some of the thoughts of the best of men are apt to be. Social conditions mingle elements of evil with the promptings of natural goodness of heart, and the mixture of motives underlying a man's intentions should be leniently judged. Castanier had just cleverness enough to be very shrewd where his own interests were concerned. So he concluded to be a philanthropist on either count, and at first made her his mistress.

"Hey! hey!" he said to himself, in his soldierly fashion, "I am an old wolf, and a sheep shall not make a fool of me. Castanier, old man,

before you set up housekeeping, reconnoiter the girl's character for a bit, and see if she is a steady sort."

This irregular union gave the Piedmontese a status the most nearly approaching respectability among those which the world declines to recognize. During the first year she took the nom de guerre of Aquilina, one of the characters in Venice Preserved which she had chanced to read. She fancied that she resembled the courtesan in face and general appearance, and in a certain precocity of heart and brain of which she was conscious. When Castanier found that her life was as well regulated and virtuous as was possible for a social outlaw, he manifested a desire that they should live as husband and wife. So she took the name of Mme. de la Garde, in order to approach, as closely as Parisian usages permit, the conditions of a real marriage. As a matter of fact, many of these unfortunate girls have one fixed idea, to be looked upon as respectable middle-class women, who lead humdrum lives of faithfulness to their husbands; women who would make excellent mothers, keepers of household accounts, and menders of household linen. This longing springs from a sentiment so laudable that society should take it into consideration. But society, incorrigible as ever, will assuredly persist in regarding the married woman as a corvette duly authorized by her flag and papers to go on her own course, while the woman who is a wife in all but name is a pirate and an outlaw for lack of a document. A day came when Mme. de la Garde would fain have signed herself "Mme. Castanier." The cashier was put out by this.

"So you do not love me well enough to marry me?" she said.

Castanier did not answer; he was absorbed by his thoughts. The poor girl resigned herself to her fate. The ex-dragoon was in despair. Naqui's heart softened toward him at the sight of his trouble; she tried to soothe him, but what could she do when she did not know what ailed him? When Naqui made up her mind to know the secret, although she never asked him a question, the cashier dolefully confessed to the existence of a Mme. Castanier. This lawful wife, a thousand times accursed, was living in a humble way in Strasbourg on a small property there; he wrote to her twice a year, and kept the secret of her existence so well, that no one suspected that he was married. The reason of this reticence? If it is familiar to many military men who may chance to be in a like predicament, it is perhaps worth while to give the story.

Your genuine trooper (if it is allowable here to employ the word which in the army signifies a man who is destined to die as a captain) is a sort of serf, a part and parcel of his regiment, an essentially simple creature, and Castanier was marked out by nature as a victim to the

wives of mothers with grown-up daughters left too long on their hands. It was at Nancy, during one of those brief intervals of repose when the Imperial armies were not on active service abroad, that Castanier was so unlucky as to pay some attention to a young lady with whom he danced at a *ridotto*, the provincial name for the entertainments often given by the military to the townsfolk, or *vice versa*, in garrison towns. A scheme for inveigling the gallant captain into matrimony was immediately set on foot, one of those schemes by which mothers secure accomplices in a human heart by touching all its motive springs, while they convert all their friends into fellow-conspirators. Like all people possessed by one idea, these ladies press everything into the service of their great project, slowly elaborating their toils, much as the ant-lion excavates its funnel in the sand and lies in wait at the bottom for its victim. Suppose that no one strays, after all, into that carefully constructed labyrinth? Suppose that the ant-lion dies of hunger and thirst in her pit? Such things may be, but if any heedless creature once enters in, it never comes out. All the wires which could be pulled to induce action on the captain's part were tried; appeals were made to the secret interested motives that always come into play in such cases; they worked on Castanier's hopes and on the weaknesses and vanity of human nature. Unluckily, he had praised the daughter to her mother when he brought her back after a waltz, a little chat followed, and then an invitation in the most natural way in the world. Once introduced into the house, the dragoon was dazzled by the hospitality of a family who appeared to conceal their real wealth beneath a show of careful economy. He was skillfully flattered on all sides, and everyone extolled for his benefit the various treasures there displayed. A neatly timed dinner, served on plate lent by an uncle, the attention shown to him by the only daughter of the house, the gossip of the town, a well-to-do sub-lieutenant who seemed likely to cut the ground from under his feet--all the innumerable snares, in short, of the provincial ant-lion were set for him, and to such good purpose, that Castanier said five years later, "To this day I do not know how it came about!"

The dragoon received fifteen thousand francs with the lady, who, after two years of marriage, became the ugliest and consequently the most peevish woman on earth. Luckily they had no children. The fair complexion (maintained by a Spartan regimen), the fresh, bright color in her face, which spoke of an engaging modesty, became overspread with blotches and pimples; her figure, which had seemed so straight, grew crooked, the angel became a suspicious and shrewish creature who drove Castanier frantic. Then the fortune took to itself wings. At length the dragoon, no longer recognizing the woman whom he had wedded, left her to live on a little property at Strasbourg, until the time when it should please God to remove her to adorn Paradise. She was one of those

virtuous women who, for want of other occupation, would weary the life out of an angel with complainings, who pray till (if their prayers are heard in heaven) they must exhaust the patience of the Almighty, and say everything that is bad of their husbands in dove-like murmurs over a game of boston with their neighbors. When Aquilina learned all these troubles she clung still more affectionately to Castanier, and made him so happy, varying with woman's ingenuity the pleasures with which she filled his life, that all unwittingly she was the cause of the cashier's downfall.

Like many women who seem by nature destined to sound all the depths of love, Mme. de la Garde was disinterested. She asked neither for gold nor for jewelry, gave no thought to the future, lived entirely for the present and for the pleasures of the present. She accepted expensive ornaments and dresses, the carriage so eagerly coveted by women of her class, as one harmony the more in the picture of life. There was absolutely no vanity in her desire not to appear at a better advantage but to look the fairer, and, moreover, no woman could live without luxuries more cheerfully. When a man of generous nature (and military men are mostly of this stamp) meets with such a woman, he feels a sort of exasperation at finding himself her debtor in generosity. He feels that he could stop a mail coach to obtain money for her if he has not sufficient for her whims. He will commit a crime if so he may be great and noble in the eyes of some woman or of his special public; such is the nature of the man. Such a lover is like a gambler who would be dishonored in his own eyes if he did not repay the sum he borrowed from a waiter in a gaming house; but will shrink from no crime, will leave his wife and children without a penny, and rob and murder, if so he may come to the gaming table with a full purse, and his honor remain untarnished among the frequenters of that fatal abode. So it was with Castanier.

He had begun by installing Aquilina in a modest fourth-floor dwelling, the furniture being of the simplest kind. But when he saw the girl's beauty and great qualities, when he had known inexpressible and unlooked-for happiness with her, he began to dote upon her, and longed to adorn his idol. Then Aquilina's toilet was so comically out of keeping with her poor abode, that for both their sakes it was clearly incumbent on him to move. The change swallowed up almost all Castanier's savings, for he furnished his domestic paradise with all the prodigality that is lavished on a kept mistress. A pretty woman must have everything pretty about her; the unity of charm in the woman and her surroundings singles her out from among her sex. This sentiment of homogeneity indeed, though it has frequently escaped the attention of observers, is instinctive in human nature; and the same prompting leads elderly spinsters to surround themselves with dreary relies of

the past. But the lovely Piedmontese must have the newest and latest fashions, and all that was daintiest and prettiest in stuffs for hangings, in silks or jewelry, in fine china and other brittle and fragile wares. She asked for nothing; but when she was called upon to make a choice, when Castanier asked her, "Which do you like?" she would answer, "Why, this is the nicest!" Love never counts the cost, and Castanier therefore always took the "nicest."

When once the standard had been set up, there was nothing for it but everything in the household must be in conformity, from the linen, plate, and crystal through a thousand and one items of expenditure down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. Castanier had meant to "do things simply," as the saying goes, but he gradually found himself more and more in debt. One expense entailed another. The clock called for candle sconces. Fires must be lighted in the ornamental grates, but the curtains and hangings were too fresh and delicate to be soiled by smuts, so they must be replaced by patent and elaborate fireplaces, warranted to give out no smoke, recent inventions of the people who are clever at drawing up a prospectus. Then Aquilina found it so nice to run about barefooted on the carpet in her room that Castanier must have soft carpets laid everywhere for the pleasure of playing with Naqui. A bathroom, too, was built for her, everything to the end that she might be more comfortable.

Shopkeepers, workmen, and manufacturers in Paris have a mysterious knack of enlarging a hole in a man's purse. They cannot give the price of anything upon inquiry; and as the paroxysm of longing cannot abide delay, orders are given by the feeble light of an approximate estimate of cost. The same people never send in the bills at once, but ply the purchaser with furniture till his head spins. Everything is so pretty, so charming; and everyone is satisfied.

A few months later the obliging furniture dealers are metamorphosed, and reappear in the shape of alarming totals on invoices that fill the soul with their horrid clamor; they are in urgent want of the money; they are, as you may say, on the brink of bankruptcy, their tears flow, it is heartrending to hear them! And then--the gulf yawns and gives up serried columns of figures marching four deep; when as a matter of fact they should have issued innocently three by three.

Before Castanier had any idea of how much he had spent, he had arranged for Aquilina to have a carriage from a livery stable when she went out, instead of a cab. Castanier was a gourmand; he engaged an excellent cook; and Aquilina, to please him, had herself made the purchases of early fruit and vegetables, rare delicacies, and exquisite wines. But, as Aquilina had nothing of her own, these gifts of hers, so precious by



reason of the thought and tact and graciousness that prompted them, were no less a drain upon Castanier's purse; he did not like his Naqui to be without money, and Naqui could not keep money in her pocket. So the table was a heavy item of expenditure for a man with Castanier's income. The ex-dragon was compelled to resort to various shifts for obtaining money, for he could not bring himself to renounce this delightful life. He loved the woman too well to cross the freaks of the mistress. He was one of those men who, through self-love or through weakness of character, can refuse nothing to a woman; false shame overpowers them, and they rather face ruin than make the admissions: "I cannot--" "My means will not permit--" "I cannot afford--"

When, therefore, Castanier saw that if he meant to emerge from the abyss of debt into which he had plunged, he must part with Aquilina and live upon bread and water, he was so unable to do without her or to change his habits of life, that daily he put off his plans of reform until the morrow. The debts were pressing, and he began by borrowing money. His position and previous character inspired confidence, and of this he took advantage to devise a system of borrowing money as he required it. Then, as the total amount of debt rapidly increased, he had recourse to those commercial inventions known as \_accommodation bills\_. This form of bill does not represent goods or other value received, and the first indorser pays the amount named for the obliging person who accepts it. This species of fraud is tolerated because it is impossible to detect it, and, moreover, it is an imaginary fraud which only becomes real if payment is ultimately refused.

When at length it was evidently impossible to borrow any longer, whether because the amount of the debt was now so greatly increased, or because Castanier was unable to pay the large amount of interest on the aforesaid sums of money, the cashier saw bankruptcy before him. On making this discovery, he decided for a fraudulent bankruptcy rather than an ordinary failure, and preferred a crime to a misdemeanor. He determined, after the fashion of the celebrated cashier of the Royal Treasury, to abuse the trust deservedly won, and to increase the number of his creditors by making a final loan of the sum sufficient to keep him in comfort in a foreign country for the rest of his days. All this, as has been seen, he had prepared to do.

Aquilina knew nothing of the irksome cares of this life; she enjoyed her existence, as many a woman does, making no inquiry as to where the money came from, even as sundry other folk will eat their buttered rolls untroubled by any restless spirit of curiosity as to the culture and growth of wheat; but as the labor and miscalculations of agriculture lie on the other side of the baker's oven, so, beneath the unappreciated luxury of many a Parisian household lie intolerable

anxieties and exorbitant toil.

While Castanier was enduring the torture of the strain, and his thoughts were full of the deed that should change his whole life, Aquilina was lying luxuriously back in a great armchair by the fireside, beguiling the time by chatting with her waiting-maid. As frequently happens in such cases, the maid had become the mistress's confidante, Jenny having first assured herself that her mistress's ascendancy over Castanier was complete.

What are we to do this evening? Léon seems determined to come," Mme. de la Garde was saying, as she read a passionate epistle indicted upon a faint gray note paper.

"Here is the master!" said Jenny.

Castanier came in. Aquilina, nowise disconcerted, crumpled up the letter, took it with the tongs, and held it in the flames.

"So that is what you do with your love letters, is it?" asked Castanier.

"Oh, goodness, yes," said Aquilina; "is it not the best way of keeping them safe? Besides, fire should go to the fire, as water makes for the river."

"You are talking as if it were a real love letter, Naqui--"

"Well, am I not handsome enough to receive them?" she said, holding up her forehead for a kiss. There was a carelessness in her manner that would have told any man less blind than Castanier that it was only a piece of conjugal duty, as it were, to give this joy to the cashier; but use and wont had brought Castanier to the point where clear-sightedness is no longer possible for love.

"I have taken a box at the Gymnase this evening," he said; "let us have dinner early, and then we need not dine in a hurry."

"Go and take Jenny. I am tired of plays. I do not know what is the matter with me this evening; I would rather stay here by the fire."

"Come, all the same though, Naqui; I shall not be here to bore you much longer. Yes, Quiqui, I am going to start to-night, and it will be some time before I come back again. I am leaving everything in your charge. Will you keep your heart for me too?"

"Neither my heart nor anything else," she said; "but when you come back again, Naqui will still be Naqui for you."

"Well, this is frankness. So you would not follow me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Eh! why, how can I leave the lover who writes me such sweet little notes?" she asked, pointing to the blackened scrap of paper with a mocking smile.

"Is there any truth in it?" asked Castanier. "Have you really a lover?"

"Really!" cried Aquilina; "and have you never given it a serious thought, dear? To begin with, you are fifty years old. Then you have just the sort of face to put on a fruit stall; if the woman tried to sell you for a pumpkin, no one would contradict her. You puff and blow like a seal when you come upstairs; your paunch rises and falls like the diamond on a woman's forehead! It is pretty plain that you served in the dragoons; you are a very ugly-looking old man. Fiddle-de-dee. If you have any mind to keep my respect, I recommend you not to add imbecility to these qualities by imagining that such a girl as I am will be content with your asthmatic love, and not look for youth and good looks and pleasure by way of variety--"

"Aquilina! you are laughing, of course?"

"Oh, very well; and are you not laughing too? Do you take me for a fool, telling me that you are going away? 'I am going to start to-night!'" she said, mimicking his tones. "Stuff and nonsense! Would you talk like that if you were really going away from your Naqui? You would cry, like the booby that you are!"

"After all, if I go, will you follow?" he asked.

"Tell me first whether this journey of yours is a bad joke or not."

"Yes, seriously, I am going."

"Well, then, seriously, I shall stay. A pleasant journey to you, my boy! I will wait till you come back. I would sooner take leave of life than take leave of my dear, cozy Paris--"

"Will you not come to Italy, to Naples, and lead a pleasant life

there--a delicious, luxurious life, with this stout old fogey of yours, who puffs and blows like a seal?"

"No."

"Ungrateful girl!"

"Ungrateful?" she cried, rising to her feet. "I might leave this house this moment and take nothing out of it but myself. I shall have given you all the treasures a young girl can give, and something that not every drop in your veins and mine can ever give me back. If, by any means whatever, by selling my hopes of eternity, for instance, I could recover my past self, body as soul (for I have, perhaps, redeemed my soul), and be pure as a lily for my lover I would not hesitate a moment! What sort of devotion has rewarded mine? You have housed and fed me, just as you give a dog food and a kennel because he is a protection to the house, and he may take kicks when we are out of humor, and lick our hands as soon as we are pleased to call to him. And which of us two will have been the more generous?"

"Oh! dear child, do you not see that I am joking?" returned Castanier. "I am going on a short journey; I shall not be away for very long. But come with me to the Gymnase; I shall start just before midnight, after I have had time to say good-by to you."

"Poor pet! so you are really going, are you?" she said. She put her arms round his neck, and drew down his head against her bodice.

"You are smothering me!" cried Castanier, with his face buried in Aquilina's breast. That damsel turned to say in Jenny's ear, "Go to Léon, and tell him not to come till one o'clock. If you do not find him, and he comes here during the leave-taking, keep him in your room.--Well," she went on, setting free Castanier, and giving a tweak to the tip of his nose, "never mind, handsomest of seals that you are. I will go to the theater with you this evening. But all in good time; let us have dinner! There is a nice little dinner for you--just what you like."

"It is very hard to part from such a woman as you!" exclaimed Castanier.

"Very well then, why do you go?" asked she.

"Ah! why? why? If I were to begin to explain the reasons why, I must tell you things that would prove to you that I love you almost to madness. Ah! if you have sacrificed your honor for me, I have sold mine

for you; we are quits. Is that love?"

"What is all this about?" said she. "Come, now, promise me that if I had a lover you would still love me as a father; that would be love! Come, now, promise it at once, and give us your fist upon it."

"I should kill you," and Castanier smiled as he spoke.

They sat down to the dinner table, and went thence to the Gymnase. When the first part of the performance was over, it occurred to Castanier to show himself to some of his acquaintances in the house, so as to turn away any suspicion of his departure. He left Mme. de la Garde in the corner box where she was seated, according to her modest wont, and went to walk up and down in the lobby. He had not gone many paces before he saw the Englishman, and with a sudden return of the sickening sensation of heat that once before had vibrated through him, and of the terror that he had felt already, he stood face to face with Melmoth.

"Forger!"

At the word, Castanier glanced round at the people who were moving about them. He fancied that he could see astonishment and curiosity in their eyes, and wishing to be rid of this Englishman at once, he raised his hand to strike him--and felt his arm paralyzed by some invisible power that sapped his strength and nailed him to the spot. He allowed the stranger to take him by the arm, and they walked together to the greenroom like two friends.

"Who is strong enough to resist me?" said the Englishman, addressing him. "Do you not know that everything here on earth must obey me, that it is in my power to do everything? I read men's thoughts, I see the future, and I know the past. I am here, and I can be elsewhere also. Time and space and distance are nothing to me. The whole world is at my beck and call. I have the power of continual enjoyment and of giving joy. I can see through walls, discover hidden treasures, and fill my hands with them. Palaces arise at my nod, and my architect makes no mistakes. I can make all lands break forth into blossom, heap up their gold and precious stones, and surround myself with fair women and ever new faces; everything is yielded up to my will. I could gamble on the Stock Exchange, and my speculations would be infallible; but a man who can find the hoards that misers have hidden in the earth need not trouble himself about stocks. Feel the strength of the hand that grasps you; poor wretch, doomed to shame! Try to bend the arm of iron! try to soften the adamant heart! Fly from me if you dare! You would hear my voice in the depths of the caves that lie under the Seine; you might hide in the Catacombs, but would you not see me there? My voice could

be heard through the sound of the thunder, my eyes shine as brightly as the sun, for I am the peer of Lucifer!"

Castanier heard the terrible words, and felt no protest nor contradiction within himself. He walked side by side with the Englishman, and had no power to leave him.

"You are mine; you have just committed a crime. I have found at last the mate whom I have sought. Have you a mind to learn your destiny? Aha! you came here to see a play, and you shall see a play--nay, two. Come. Present me to Mme. de la Garde as one of your best friends. Am I not your last hope of escape?"

Castanier, followed by the stranger, returned to his box; and in accordance with the order he had just received, he hastened to introduce Melmoth to Mme. de la Garde. Aquilina seemed to be not in the least surprised. The Englishman declined to take a seat in front, and Castanier was once more beside his mistress; the man's slightest wish must be obeyed. The last piece was about to begin, for, at that time, small theaters only gave three pieces. One of the actors had made the Gymnase the fashion, and that evening Perlet (the actor in question) was to play in a vaudeville called \_Le Comédien d'Étampes\_, in which he filled four different parts.

When the curtain rose, the stranger stretched out his hand over the crowded house. Castanier's cry of terror died away, for the walls of his throat seemed glued together as Melmoth pointed to the stage, and the cashier knew that the play had been changed at the Englishman's desire.

He saw the strong room at the bank; he saw the Baron de Nucingen in conference with a police officer from the prefecture, who was informing him of Castanier's conduct, explaining that the cashier had absconded with money taken from the safe, giving the history of the forged signature. The information was put in writing; the document signed and duly dispatched to the public prosecutor.

"Are we in time, do you think?" asked Nucingen.

"Yes," said the agent of police; "he is at the Gymnase, and has no suspicion of anything."

Castanier fidgeted on his chair, and made as if he would leave the theater, but Melmoth's hand lay on his shoulder, and he was obliged to sit and watch; the hideous power of the man produced an effect like that of nightmare, and he could not move a limb. Nay, the man himself

was the nightmare; his presence weighed heavily on his victim like a poisoned atmosphere. When the wretched cashier turned to implore the Englishman's mercy, he met those blazing eyes that discharged electric currents, which pierced through him and transfixed him like darts of steel.

"What have I done to you?" he said, in his prostrate helplessness, and he breathed hard like a stag at the water's edge. "What do you want of me?"

"Look!" cried Melmoth.

Castanier looked at the stage. The scene had been changed. The play seemed to be over, and Castanier beheld himself stepping from the carriage with Aquilina; but as he entered the courtyard of the house in the Rue Richer, the scene again was suddenly changed, and he saw his own house. Jenny was chatting by the fire in her mistress's room with a subaltern officer of a line regiment then stationed at Paris.

"He is going, is he?" said the sergeant, who seemed to belong to a family in easy circumstances; "I can be happy at my ease! I love Aquilina too well to allow her to belong to that old toad! I, myself, am going to marry Mme. de la Garde!" cried the sergeant.

"Old toad!" Castanier murmured piteously.

"Here come the master and mistress; hide yourself! Stay, get in here, Monsieur Léon," said Jenny. "The master won't stay here for very long."

Castanier watched the sergeant hide himself among Aquilina's gowns in her dressing room. Almost immediately he himself appeared upon the scene, and took leave of his mistress, who made fun of him in "asides" to Jenny, while she uttered the sweetest and tenderest words in his ears. She wept with one side of her face, and laughed with the other. The audience called for an encore.

"Accursed creature!" cried Castanier from his box.

Aquilina was laughing till the tears came into her eyes.

"Goodness!" she cried, "how funny Perlet is as the Englishwoman!... Why don't you laugh? Everyone else in the house is laughing. Laugh, dear!" she said to Castanier.

Melmoth burst out laughing, and the unhappy cashier shuddered. The Englishman's laughter wrung his heart and tortured his brain; it was as

if a surgeon had bored his skull with a red-hot iron.

"Laughing! are they laughing?" stammered Castanier.

He did not see the prim English lady whom Perlet was acting with such ludicrous effect, nor hear the English-French that had filled the house with roars of laughter; instead of all this, he beheld himself hurrying from the Rue Richer, hailing a cab on the Boulevard, bargaining with the man to take him to Versailles. Then once more the scene changed. He recognized the sorry inn at the corner of the Rue de l'Orangerie and the Rue des Récollets, which was kept by his old quartermaster. It was two o'clock in the morning, the most perfect stillness prevailed, no one was there to watch his movements. The post-horses were put into the carriage (it came from a house in the Avenue de Paris in which an Englishman lived, and had been ordered in the foreigner's name to avoid raising suspicion). Castanier saw that he had his bills and his passports, stepped into the carriage, and set out. But at the barrier he saw two gendarmes lying in wait for the carriage. A cry of horror burst from him, but Melmoth gave him a glance, and again the sound died in his throat.

"Keep your eyes on the stage, and be quiet!" said the Englishman.

In another moment Castanier saw himself flung into prison at the Conciergerie; and in the fifth act of the drama, entitled The Cashier, he saw himself, in three months' time, condemned to twenty years of penal servitude. Again a cry broke from him. He was exposed upon the Place du Palais-de-Justice, and the executioner branded him with a red-hot iron. Then came the last scene of all; among some sixty convicts in the prison yard of the Bicêtre, he was awaiting his turn to have the irons riveted on his limbs.

"Dear me! I cannot laugh any more!..." said Aquilina. "You are very solemn, dear boy; what can be the matter? The gentleman has gone."

"A word with you, Castanier," said Melmoth when the piece was at an end, and the attendant was fastening Mme. de la Garde's cloak.

The corridor was crowded, and escape impossible.

"Very well, what is it?"

"No human power can hinder you from taking Aquilina home, and going next to Versailles, there to be arrested."

"How so?"



"Because you are in a hand that will never relax its grasp," returned the Englishman.

Castanier longed for the power to utter some word that should blot him out from among living men and hide him in the lowest depths of hell.

"Suppose that the devil were to make a bid for your soul, would you not give it to him now in exchange for the power of God? One single word, and those five hundred thousand francs shall be back in the Baron de Nucingen's safe; then you can tear up your letter of credit, and all traces of your crime will be obliterated. Moreover, you would have gold in torrents. You hardly believe in anything perhaps? Well, if all this comes to pass, you will believe at least in the devil."

"If it were only possible!" said Castanier joyfully.

"The man who can do it all gives you his word that it is possible," answered the Englishman.

Melmoth, Castanier, and Mme. de la Garde were standing out in the Boulevard when Melmoth raised his arm. A drizzling rain was falling, the streets were muddy, the air was close, there was thick darkness overhead; but in a moment, as the arm was outstretched, Paris was filled with sunlight; it was high noon on a bright July day. The trees were covered with leaves; a double stream of joyous holiday makers strolled beneath them. Sellers of licorice water shouted their cool drinks. Splendid carriages rolled past along the streets. A cry of terror broke from the cashier, and at that cry rain and darkness once more settled down upon the Boulevard.

Mme. de la Garde had stepped into the carriage. "Do be quick, dear!" she cried; "either come in or stay out. Really, you are as dull as ditch-water this evening--"

"What must I do?" Castanier asked of Melmoth.

"Would you like to take my place?" inquired the Englishman.

"Yes."

"Very well, then; I will be at your house in a few moments."

"By the bye, Castanier, you are rather off your balance," Aquilina remarked. "There is some mischief brewing; you were quite melancholy and thoughtful all through the play. Do you want anything that I can

give you, dear? Tell me."

"I am waiting till we are at home to know whether you love me."

"You need not wait till then," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "There!" she said, as she embraced him, passionately to all appearance, and plied him with the coaxing caresses that are part of the business of such a life as hers, like stage action for an actress.

"Where is the music?" asked Castanier.

"What next? Only think of your hearing music now!"

"Heavenly music!" he went on. "The sounds seem to come from above."

"What? You have always refused to give me a box at the Italiens because you could not abide music, and are you turning music-mad at this time of day? Mad--that you are! The music is inside your own noddle, old addle-pate!" she went on, as she took his head in her hands and rocked it to and fro on her shoulder. "Tell me now, old man; isn't it the creaking of the wheels that sings in your ears?"

"Just listen, Naqui! If the angels make music for God Almighty, it must be such music as this that I am drinking in at every pore, rather than hearing. I do not know how to tell you about it; it is as sweet as honey water!"

"Why, of course, they have music in heaven, for the angels in all the pictures have harps in their hands. He is mad, upon my word!" she said to herself, as she saw Castanier's attitude; he looked like an opium eater in a blissful trance.

They reached the house. Castanier, absorbed by the thought of all that he had just heard and seen, knew not whether to believe it or no; he was like a drunken man, and utterly unable to think connectedly. He came to himself in Aquilina's room, whither he had been supported by the united efforts of his mistress, the porter, and Jenny; for he had fainted as he stepped from the carriage.

"\_He\_ will be here directly! Oh, my friends, my friends!" he cried, and he flung himself despairingly into the depths of a low chair beside the fire.

Jenny heard the bell as he spoke, and admitted the Englishman. She announced that "a gentleman had come who had made an appointment with the master," when Melmoth suddenly appeared, and deep silence followed.

He looked at the porter--the porter went; he looked at Jenny--and Jenny went likewise.

"Madame," said Melmoth, turning to Aquilina, "with your permission, we will conclude a piece of urgent business."

He took Castanier's hand, and Castanier rose, and the two men went into the drawing-room. There was no light in the room, but Melmoth's eyes lit up the thickest darkness. The gaze of those strange eyes had left Aquilina like one spellbound; she was helpless, unable to take any thought for her lover; moreover, she believed him to be safe in Jenny's room, whereas their early return had taken the waiting woman by surprise, and she had hidden the officer in the dressing room. It had all happened exactly as in the drama that Melmoth had displayed for his victim. Presently the house door was slammed violently, and Castanier reappeared.

"What ails you?" cried the horror-struck Aquilina.

There was a change in the cashier's appearance. A strange pallor overspread his once rubicund countenance; it wore the peculiarly sinister and stony look of the mysterious visitor. The sullen glare of his eyes was intolerable, the fierce light in them seemed to scorch. The man who had looked so good-humored and good-natured had suddenly grown tyrannical and proud. The courtesan thought that Castanier had grown thinner; there was a terrible majesty in his brow; it was as if a dragon breathed forth a malignant influence that weighed upon the others like a close, heavy atmosphere. For a moment Aquilina knew not what to do.

"What passed between you and that diabolical-looking man in those few minutes?" she asked at length.

"I have sold my soul to him. I feel it; I am no longer the same. He has taken my self, and given me his soul in exchange."

"What?"

"You would not understand it at all.... Ah! he was right," Castanier went on, "the fiend was right! I see everything and know all things.--You have been deceiving me!"

Aquilina turned cold with terror. Castanier lighted a candle and went into the dressing room. The unhappy girl followed him in dazed bewilderment, and great was her astonishment when Castanier drew the dresses that hung there aside and disclosed the sergeant.

"Come out, my boy," said the cashier; and, taking Léon by a button of his overcoat, he drew the officer into his room.

The Piedmontese, haggard and desperate, had flung herself into her easy chair. Castanier seated himself on a sofa by the fire, and left Aquilina's lover in a standing position.

"You have been in the army," said Léon; "I am ready to give you satisfaction."

"You are a fool," said Castanier dryly. "I have no occasion to fight. I could kill you by a look if I had any mind to do it. I will tell you what it is, youngster; why should I kill you? I can see a red line round your neck--the guillotine is waiting for you. Yes, you will end in the Place de Grève. You are the headsman's property! there is no escape for you. You belong to a \_vendita\_ of the Carbonari. You are plotting against the Government."

"You did not tell me that," cried the Piedmontese, turning to Léon.

"So you do not know that the Minister decided this morning to put down your Society?" the cashier continued. "The Procureur-Général has a list of your names. You have been betrayed. They are busy drawing up the indictment at this moment."

"Then was it you who betrayed him?" cried Aquilina, and with a hoarse sound in her throat like the growl of a tigress she rose to her feet; she seemed as if she would tear Castanier in pieces.

"You know me too well to believe it," Castanier retorted. Aquilina was benumbed by his coolness.

"Then how did you know it?" she murmured.

"I did not know it until I went into the drawing-room; now I know it--now I see and know all things, and can do all things."

The sergeant was overcome with amazement.

"Very well then, save him, save him, dear!" cried the girl, flinging herself at Castanier's feet. "If nothing is impossible to you, save him! I will love you, I will adore you, I will be your slave and not your mistress. I will obey your wildest whims; you shall do as you will with me. Yes, yes, I will give you more than love; you shall have a daughter's devotion as well as ... Rodolphe! why will you not

understand! After all, however violent my passions may be, I shall be yours forever! What should I say to persuade you? I will invent pleasures ... I ... Great heavens! one moment! whatever you shall ask of me--to fling myself from the window, for instance--you will need to say but one word, 'Léon!' and I will plunge down into hell. I would bear any torture, any pain of body or soul, anything you might inflict upon me!"

Castanier heard her with indifference. For all answer, he indicated Léon to her with a fiendish laugh.

"The guillotine is waiting for him," he repeated.

"No, no, no! He shall not leave this house. I will save him!" she cried. "Yes; I will kill anyone who lays a finger upon him! Why will you not save him?" she shrieked aloud; her eyes were blazing, her hair unbound. "Can you save him?"

"I can do everything."

"Why do you not save him?"

"Why?" shouted Castanier, and his voice made the ceiling ring.--"Eh! it is my revenge! Doing evil is my trade!"

"Die?" said Aquilina; "must he die, my lover? Is it possible?"

She sprang up and snatched a stiletto from a basket that stood on the chest of drawers and went to Castanier, who began to laugh.

"You know very well that steel cannot hurt me now--"

Aquilina's arm suddenly dropped like a snapped harp string.

"Out with you, my good friend," said the cashier, turning to the sergeant, "and go about your business."

He held out his hand; the other felt Castanier's superior power, and could not choose but obey.

"This house is mine; I could send for the commissary of police if I chose, and give you up as a man who has hidden himself on my premises, but I would rather let you go; I am a fiend, I am not a spy."

"I shall follow him!" said Aquilina.

"Then follow him," returned Castanier.--"Here, Jenny--"

Jenny appeared.

"Tell the porter to hail a cab for them.--Here, Naqui," said Castanier, drawing a bundle of banknotes from his pocket; "you shall not go away like a pauper from a man who loves you still."

He held out three hundred thousand francs. Aquilina took the notes, flung them on the floor, spat on them, and trampled upon them in a frenzy of despair.

"We will leave this house on foot," she cried, "without a farthing of your money.--Jenny, stay where you are."

"Good evening!" answered the cashier, as he gathered up the notes again. "I have come back from my journey.--Jenny," he added, looking at the bewildered waiting maid, "you seem to me to be a good sort of girl. You have no mistress now. Come here. This evening you shall have a master."

Aquilina, who felt safe nowhere, went at once with the sergeant to the house of one of her friends. But all Léon's movements were suspiciously watched by the police, and after a time he and three of his friends were arrested. The whole story may be found in the newspapers of that day.

\* \* \* \* \*

Castanier felt that he had undergone a mental as well as a physical transformation. The Castanier of old no longer existed--the boy, the young Lothario, the soldier who had proved his courage, who had been tricked into a marriage and disillusioned, the cashier, the passionate lover who had committed a crime for Aquilina's sake. His inmost nature had suddenly asserted itself. His brain had expanded, his senses had developed. His thoughts comprehended the whole world; he saw all the things of earth as if he had been raised to some high pinnacle above the world.

Until that evening at the play he had loved Aquilina to distraction. Rather than give her up he would have shut his eyes to her infidelities; and now all that blind passion had passed away as a cloud vanishes in the sunlight.

Jenny was delighted to succeed to her mistress's position and fortune, and did the cashier's will in all things; but Castanier, who could read

the inmost thoughts of the soul, discovered the real motive underlying this purely physical devotion. He amused himself with her, however, like a mischievous child who greedily sucks the juice of the cherry and flings away the stone. The next morning at breakfast time, when she was fully convinced that she was a lady and the mistress of the house, Castanier uttered one by one the thoughts that filled her mind as she drank her coffee.

"Do you know what you are thinking, child?" he said, smiling. "I will tell you: 'So all that lovely rosewood furniture that I coveted so much, and the pretty dresses that I used to try on, are mine now! All on easy terms that madame refused, I do not know why. My word! if I might drive about in a carriage, have jewels and pretty things, a box at the theater, and put something by! with me he should lead a life of pleasure fit to kill him if he were not as strong as a Turk! I never saw such a man!'"--Was not that just what you were thinking?" he went on, and something in his voice made Jenny turn pale. "Well, yes, child; you could not stand it, and I am sending you away for your own good; you would perish in the attempt. Come, let us part good friends," and he coolly dismissed her with a very small sum of money.

The first use that Castanier had promised himself that he would make of the terrible power bought at the price of his eternal happiness, was the full and complete indulgence of all his tastes.

He first put his affairs in order, readily settled his account with M. de Nucingen, who found a worthy German to succeed him, and then determined on a carouse worthy of the palmiest days of the Roman Empire. He plunged into dissipation as recklessly as Belshazzar of old went to that last feast in Babylon. Like Belshazzar, he saw clearly through his revels a gleaming hand that traced his doom in letters of flame, not on the narrow walls of the banqueting chamber, but over the vast spaces of heaven that the rainbow spans. His feast was not, indeed, an orgy confined within the limits of a banquet, for he squandered all the powers of soul and body in exhausting all the pleasures of earth. The table was in some sort earth itself, the earth that trembled beneath his feet. He was the last festival of the reckless spendthrift who has thrown all prudence to the winds. The devil had given him the key of the storehouse of human pleasures; he had filled and refilled his hands, and he was fast nearing the bottom. In a moment he had felt all that that enormous power could accomplish; in a moment he had exercised it, proved it, wearied of it. What had hitherto been the sum of human desires became as nothing. So often it happens that with possession the vast poetry of desire must end, and the thing possessed is seldom the thing that we dreamed of.

Beneath Melmoth's omnipotence lurked this tragical anticlimax of so many a passion, and now the inanity of human nature was revealed to his successor, to whom infinite power brought Nothingness as a dowry.

To come to a clear understanding of Castanier's strange position, it must be borne in mind how suddenly these revolutions of thought and feeling had been wrought; how quickly they had succeeded each other; and of these things it is hard to give any idea to those who have never broken the prison bonds of time, and space, and distance. His relation to the world without had been entirely changed with the expansion of his faculties.

Like Melmoth himself, Castanier could travel in a few moments over the fertile plains of India, could soar on the wings of demons above African desert spaces, or skim the surface of the seas. The same insight that could read the inmost thoughts of others, could apprehend at a glance the nature of any material object, just as he caught as it were all flavors at once upon his tongue. He took his pleasure like a despot; a blow of the ax felled the tree that he might eat its fruits. The transitions, the alternations that measure joy and pain, and diversify human happiness, no longer existed for him. He had so completely glutted his appetites that pleasure must overpass the limits of pleasure to tickle a palate cloyed with satiety, and suddenly grown fastidious beyond all measure, so that ordinary pleasures became distasteful. Conscious that at will he was the master of all the women that he could desire, knowing that his power was irresistible, he did not care to exercise it; they were pliant to his unexpressed wishes, to his most extravagant caprices, until he felt a horrible thirst for love, and would have love beyond their power to give.

The world refused him nothing save faith and prayer, the soothing and consoling love that is not of this world. He was obeyed--it was a horrible position.

The torrents of pain, and pleasure, and thought that shook his soul and his bodily frame would have overwhelmed the strongest human being; but in him there was a power of vitality proportioned to the power of the sensations that assailed him. He felt within him a vague immensity of longing that earth could not satisfy. He spent his days on outspread wings, longing to traverse the luminous fields of space to other spheres that he knew afar by intuitive perception, a clear and hopeless knowledge. His soul dried up within him, for he hungered and thirsted after things that can neither be drunk nor eaten, but for which he could not choose but crave. His lips, like Melmoth's, burned with desire; he panted for the unknown, for he knew all things.



The mechanism and the scheme of the world was apparent to him, and its working interested him no longer; he did not long disguise the profound scorn that makes of a man of extraordinary powers a sphinx who knows everything and says nothing, and sees all things with an unmoved countenance. He felt not the slightest wish to communicate his knowledge to other men. He was rich with all the wealth of the world, with one effort he could make the circle of the globe, and riches and power were meaningless for him. He felt the awful melancholy of omnipotence, a melancholy which Satan and God relieve by the exercise of infinite power in mysterious ways known to them alone. Castanier had not, like his Master, the inextinguishable energy of hate and malice; he felt that he was a devil, but a devil whose time was not yet come, while Satan is a devil through all eternity, and being damned beyond redemption, delights to stir up the world, like a dunghill, with his triple fork and to thwart therein the designs of God. But Castanier, for his misfortune, had one hope left.

If in a moment he could move from one pole to the other as a bird springs restlessly from side to side in its cage, when, like the bird, he had crossed his prison, he saw the vast immensity of space beyond it. That vision of the Infinite left him forever unable to see humanity and its affairs as other men saw them. The insensate fools who long for the power of the Devil gauge its desirability from a human standpoint; they do not see that with the Devil's power they will likewise assume his thoughts, and that they will be doomed to remain as men among creatures who will no longer understand them. The Nero unknown to history who dreams of setting Paris on fire for his private entertainment, like an exhibition of a burning house on the boards of a theater, does not suspect that if he had that power, Paris would become for him as little interesting as an ant heap by the roadside to a hurrying passer-by. The circle of the sciences was for Castanier something like a logograph for a man who does not know the key to it. Kings and Governments were despicable in his eyes. His great debauch had been in some sort a deplorable farewell to his life as a man. The earth had grown too narrow for him, for the infernal gifts laid bare for him the secrets of creation--he saw the cause and foresaw its end. He was shut out from all that men call "heaven" in all languages under the sun; he could no longer think of heaven.

Then he came to understand the look on his predecessor's face and the drying up of the life within; then he knew all that was meant by the baffled hope that gleamed in Melmoth's eyes; he, too, knew the thirst that burned those red lips, and the agony of a continual struggle between two natures grown to giant size. Even yet he might be an angel, and he knew himself to be a fiend. His was the fate of a sweet and gentle creature that a wizard's malice has imprisoned in a misshapen

form, entrapping it by a pact, so that another's will must set it free from its detested envelope.

As a deception only increases the ardor with which a man of really great nature explores the infinite of sentiment in a woman's heart, so Castanier awoke to find that one idea lay like a weight upon his soul, an idea which was perhaps the key to loftier spheres. The very fact that he had bartered away his eternal happiness led him to dwell in thought upon the future of those who pray and believe. On the morrow of his debauch, when he entered into the sober possession of his power, this idea made him feel himself a prisoner; he knew the burden of the woe that poets, and prophets, and great oracles of faith have set forth for us in such mighty words; he felt the point of the Flaming Sword plunged into his side, and hurried in search of Melmoth. What had become of his predecessor?

The Englishman was living in a mansion in the Rue Férou, near Saint-Sulpice--a gloomy, dark, damp, and cold abode. The Rue Férou itself is one of the most dismal streets in Paris; it has a north aspect like all the streets that lie at right angles to the left bank of the Seine, and the houses are in keeping with the site. As Castanier stood on the threshold he found that the door itself, like the vaulted roof, was hung with black; rows of lighted tapers shone brilliantly as though some king were lying in state; and a priest stood on either side of a catafalque that had been raised there.

"There is no need to ask why you have come, sir," the old hall porter said to Castanier; "you are so like our poor dear master that is gone. But if you are his brother, you have come too late to bid him good-by. The good gentleman died the night before last."

"How did he die?" Castanier asked of one of the priests.

"Set your mind at rest," said an old priest; he partly raised as he spoke the black pall that covered the catafalque.

Castanier, looking at him, saw one of those faces that faith has made sublime; the soul seemed to shine forth from every line of it, bringing light and warmth for other men, kindled by the unflinching charity within. This was Sir John Melmoth's confessor.

"Your brother made an end that men may envy, and that must rejoice the angels. Do you know what joy there is in heaven over a sinner that repents? His tears of penitence, excited by grace, flowed without ceasing; death alone checked them. The Holy Spirit dwelt in him. His burning words, full of lively faith, were worthy of the Prophet-King.

If, in the course of my life, I have never heard a more dreadful confession than from the lips of this Irish gentleman, I have likewise never heard such fervent and passionate prayers. However great the measures of his sins may have been, his repentance has filled the abyss to overflowing. The hand of God was visibly stretched out above him, for he was completely changed, there was such heavenly beauty in his face. The hard eyes were softened by tears; the resonant voice that struck terror into those who heard it took the tender and compassionate tones of those who themselves have passed through deep humiliation. He so edified those who heard his words that some who had felt drawn to see the spectacle of a Christian's death fell on their knees as he spoke of heavenly things, and of the infinite glory of God, and gave thanks and praise to Him. If he is leaving no worldly wealth to his family, no family can possess a greater blessing than this that he surely gained for them, a soul among the blessed, who will watch over you all and direct you in the path to heaven."

These words made such a vivid impression upon Castanier that he instantly hurried from the house to the Church of Saint-Sulpice, obeying what might be called a decree of fate. Melmoth's repentance had stupefied him.

At that time, on certain mornings in the week, a preacher, famed for his eloquence, was wont to hold conferences, in the course of which he demonstrated the truths of the Catholic faith for the youth of a generation proclaimed to be indifferent in matters of belief by another voice no less eloquent than his own. The conference had been put off to a later hour on account of Melmoth's funeral, so Castanier arrived just as the great preacher was epitomizing the proofs of a future existence of happiness with all the charm of eloquence and force of expression which have made him famous. The seeds of divine doctrine fell into a soil prepared for them in the old dragoon, into whom the Devil had glided. Indeed, if there is a phenomenon well attested by experience, is it not the spiritual phenomenon commonly called "the faith of the peasant"? The strength of belief varies inversely with the amount of use that a man has made of his reasoning faculties. Simple people and soldiers belong to the unreasoning class. Those who have marched through life beneath the banner of instinct are far more ready to receive the light than minds and hearts overwearied with the world's sophistries.

Castanier had the southern temperament; he had joined the army as a lad of sixteen, and had followed the French flag till he was nearly forty years old. As a common trooper, he had fought day and night, and day after day, and, as in duty bound, had thought of his horse first, and of himself afterwards. While he served his military apprenticeship,

therefore, he had but little leisure in which to reflect on the destiny of man, and when he became an officer he had his men to think of. He had been swept from battlefield to battlefield, but he had never thought of what comes after death. A soldier's life does not demand much thinking. Those who cannot understand the lofty political ends involved and the interests of nation and nation; who cannot grasp political schemes as well as plans of campaign and combine the science of the tactician with that of the administrator, are bound to live in a state of ignorance; the most boorish peasant in the most backward district in France is scarcely in a worse case. Such men as these bear the brunt of war, yield passive obedience to the brain that directs them, and strike down the men opposed to them as the woodcutter fells timber in the forest. Violent physical exertion is succeeded by times of inertia, when they repair the waste. They fight and drink, fight and eat, fight and sleep, that they may the better deal hard blows; the powers of the mind are not greatly exercised in this turbulent round of existence, and the character is as simple as heretofore.

When the men who have shown such energy on the battlefield return to ordinary civilization, most of those who have not risen to high rank seem to have acquired no ideas, and to have no aptitude, no capacity, for grasping new ideas. To the utter amazement of a younger generation, those who made our armies so glorious and so terrible are as simple as children, and as slow-witted as a clerk at his worst, and the captain of a thundering squadron is scarcely fit to keep a merchant's day-book. Old soldiers of this stamp, therefore, being innocent of any attempt to use their reasoning faculties, act upon their strongest impulses. Castanier's crime was one of those matters that raise so many questions, that, in order to debate about it, a moralist might call for its "discussion by clauses," to make use of a parliamentary expression.

Passion had counseled the crime; the cruelly irresistible power of feminine witchery had driven him to commit it; no man can say of himself, "I will never do that," when a siren joins in the combat and throws her spells over him.

So the word of life fell upon a conscience newly awakened to the truths of religion which the French Revolution and a soldier's career had forced Castanier to neglect. The solemn words, "You will be happy or miserable for all eternity!" made but the more terrible impression upon him, because he had exhausted earth and shaken it like a barren tree; because his desires could effect all things, so that it was enough that any spot in earth or heaven should be forbidden him, and he forthwith thought of nothing else. If it were allowable to compare such great things with social follies, Castanier's position was not unlike that of a banker who, finding that his all-powerful millions cannot obtain for

him an entrance into the society of the noblesse, must set his heart upon entering that circle, and all the social privileges that he has already acquired are as nothing in his eyes from the moment when he discovers that a single one is lacking.

Here was a man more powerful than all the kings on earth put together; a man who, like Satan, could wrestle with God Himself; leaning against one of the pillars in the Church of Saint-Sulpice, weighed down by the feelings and thoughts that oppressed him, and absorbed in the thought of a Future, the same thought that had engulfed Melmoth.

"He was very happy, was Melmoth!" cried Castanier. "He died in the certain knowledge that he would go to heaven."

In a moment the greatest possible change had been wrought in the cashier's ideas. For several days he had been a devil, now he was nothing but a man; an image of the fallen Adam, of the sacred tradition embodied in all cosmogonies. But while he had thus shrunk to manhood, he retained a germ of greatness, he had been steeped in the Infinite. The power of hell had revealed the divine power. He thirsted for heaven as he had never thirsted after the pleasures of earth, that are so soon exhausted. The enjoyments which the fiend promises are but the enjoyments of earth on a larger scale, but to the joys of heaven there is no limit. He believed in God, and the spell that gave him the treasures of the world was as nothing to him now; the treasures themselves seemed to him as contemptible as pebbles to an admirer of diamonds; they were but gewgaws compared with the eternal glories of the other life. A curse lay, he thought, on all things that came to him from this source. He sounded dark depths of painful thought as he listened to the service performed for Melmoth. The *\_Dies iræ\_* filled him with awe; he felt all the grandeur of that cry of a repentant soul trembling before the Throne of God. The Holy Spirit, like a devouring flame, passed through him as fire consumes straw.

The tears were falling from his eyes when--"Are you a relation of the dead?" the beadle asked him.

"I am his heir," Castanier answered.

"Give something for the expenses of the services!" cried the man.

"No," said the cashier. (The Devil's money should not go to the Church.)

"For the poor!"

"No."

"For repairing the Church!"

"No."

"The Lady Chapel!"

"No."

"For the schools!"

"No."

Castanier went, not caring to expose himself to the sour looks that the irritated functionaries gave him.

Outside, in the street, he looked up at the Church of Saint-Sulpice. "What made people build the giant cathedrals I have seen in every country?" he asked himself. "The feeling shared so widely throughout all time must surely be based upon something."

"Something! Do you call God \_something\_?" cried his conscience. "God! God! God!..."

The word was echoed and reëchoed by an inner voice, till it overwhelmed him; but his feeling of terror subsided as he heard sweet distant sounds of music that he had caught faintly before. They were singing in the church, he thought, and his eyes scanned the great doorway. But as he listened more closely, the sounds poured upon him from all sides; he looked round the square, but there was no sign of any musicians. The melody brought visions of a distant heaven and far-off gleams of hope; but it also quickened the remorse that had set the lost soul in a ferment. He went on his way through Paris, walking as men walk who are crushed beneath the burden of their sorrow, seeing everything with unseeing eyes, loitering like an idler, stopping without cause, muttering to himself, careless of the traffic, making no effort to avoid a blow from a plank of timber.

Imperceptibly repentance brought him under the influence of the divine grace that soothes while it bruises the heart so terribly. His face came to wear a look of Melmoth, something great, with a trace of madness in the greatness. A look of dull and hopeless distress, mingled with the excited eagerness of hope, and, beneath it all, a gnawing sense of loathing for all that the world can give. The humblest of prayers lurked in the eyes that saw with such dreadful clearness. His

power was the measure of his anguish. His body was bowed down by the fearful storm that shook his soul, as the tall pines bend before the blast. Like his predecessor, he could not refuse to bear the burden of life; he was afraid to die while he bore the yoke of hell. The torment grew intolerable.

At last, one morning, he bethought himself how that Melmoth (now among the blessed) had made the proposal of an exchange, and how that he had accepted it; others, doubtless, would follow his example; for in an age proclaimed, by the inheritors of the eloquence of the Fathers of the Church, to be fatally indifferent to religion, it should be easy to find a man who would accept the conditions of the contract in order to prove its advantages.

"There is one place where you can learn what kings will fetch in the market; where nations are weighed in the balance and systems appraised; where the value of a government is stated in terms of the five-franc piece; where ideas and beliefs have their price, and everything is discounted; where God Himself, in a manner, borrows on the security of His revenue of souls, for the Pope has a running account there. Is it not there that I should go to traffic in souls?"

Castanier went quite joyously on 'Change, thinking that it would be as easy to buy a soul as to invest money in the Funds. Any ordinary person would have feared ridicule, but Castanier knew by experience that a desperate man takes everything seriously. A prisoner lying under sentence of death would listen to the madman who should tell him that by pronouncing some gibberish he could escape through the keyhole; for suffering is credulous, and clings to an idea until it fails, as the swimmer borne along by the current clings to the branch that snaps in his hand.

Toward four o'clock that afternoon Castanier appeared among the little knots of men who were transacting private business after 'Change. He was personally known to some of the brokers; and while affecting to be in search of an acquaintance, he managed to pick up the current gossip and rumors of failure.

"Catch me negotiating bills for Claparon & Co., my boy. The bank collector went round to return their acceptances to them this morning," said a fat banker in his outspoken way. "If you have any of their paper, look out."

Claparon was in the building, in deep consultation with a man well known for the ruinous rate at which he lent money. Castanier went forthwith in search of the said Claparon, a merchant who had a

reputation for taking heavy risks that meant wealth or utter ruin. The money lender walked away as Castanier came up. A gesture betrayed the speculator's despair.

"Well, Claparon, the bank wants a hundred thousand francs of you, and it is four o'clock; the thing is known, and it is too late to arrange your little failure comfortably," said Castanier.

"Sir!"

"Speak lower," the cashier went on. "How if I were to propose a piece of business that would bring you in as much money as you require?"

"It would not discharge my liabilities; every business that I ever heard of wants a little time to simmer in."

"I know of something that will set you straight in a moment," answered Castanier; "but first you would have to--"

"Do what?"

"Sell your share of Paradise. It is a matter of business like anything else, isn't it? We all hold shares in the great Speculation of Eternity."

"I tell you this," said Claparon angrily, "that I am just the man to lend you a slap in the face. When a man is in trouble, it is no time to play silly jokes on him."

"I am talking seriously," said Castanier, and he drew a bundle of notes from his pocket.

"In the first place," said Claparon, "I am not going to sell my soul to the Devil for a trifle. I want five hundred thousand francs before I strike--"

"Who talks of stinting you?" asked Castanier, cutting him short. "You should have more gold than you could stow in the cellars of the Bank of France."

He held out a handful of notes. That decided Claparon.

"Done," he cried; "but how is the bargain to be made?"

"Let us go over yonder, no one is standing there," said Castanier, pointing to a corner of the court.



Claparon and his tempter exchanged a few words, with their faces turned to the wall. None of the onlookers guessed the nature of this by-play, though their curiosity was keenly excited by the strange gestures of the two contracting parties. When Castanier returned, there was a sudden outburst of amazed exclamation. As in the Assembly where the least event immediately attracts attention, all faces were turned to the two men who had caused the sensation, and a shiver passed through all beholders at the change that had taken place in them.

The men who form the moving crowd that fills the Stock Exchange are soon known to each other by sight. They watch each other like players round a card table. Some shrewd observers can tell how a man will play and the condition of his exchequer from a survey of his face; and the Stock Exchange is simply a vast card table. Everyone, therefore, had noticed Claparon and Castanier. The latter (like the Irishman before him[1]) had been muscular and powerful, his eyes were full of light, his color high. The dignity and power in his face had struck awe into them all; they wondered how old Castanier had come by it; and now they beheld Castanier divested of his power, shrunken, wrinkled, aged, and feeble. He had drawn Claparon out of the crowd with the energy of a sick man in a fever fit; he had looked like an opium eater during the brief period of excitement that the drug can give; now, on his return, he seemed to be in the condition of utter exhaustion in which the patient dies after the fever departs, or to be suffering from the horrible prostration that follows on excessive indulgence in the delights of narcotics. The infernal power that had upheld him through his debauches had left him, and the body was left unaided and alone to endure the agony of remorse and the heavy burden of sincere repentance. Claparon's troubles everyone could guess; but Claparon reappeared, on the other hand, with sparkling eyes, holding his head high with the pride of Lucifer. The crisis had passed from the one man to the other.

[1] Referring to John Melmoth--see note at head of this story.--EDITOR.

"Now you can drop off with an easy mind, old man," said Claparon to Castanier.

"For pity's sake, send for a cab and for a priest; send for the curate of Saint-Sulpice!" answered the old dragon, sinking down upon the curbstone.

The words "a priest" reached the ears of several people, and produced uproarious jeering among the stockbrokers, for faith with these gentlemen means a belief that a scrap of paper called a mortgage represents an estate, and the List of Fundholders is their Bible.

"Shall I have time to repent?" said Castanier to himself, in a piteous voice, that impressed Claparon.

A cab carried away the dying man; the speculator went to the bank at once to meet his bills; and the momentary sensation produced upon the throng of business men by the sudden change on the two faces, vanished like the furrow cut by a ship's keel in the sea. News of the greatest importance kept the attention of the world of commerce on the alert; and when commercial interests are at stake, Moses might appear with his two luminous horns, and his coming would scarcely receive the honors of a pun; the gentlemen whose business it is to write the Market Reports would ignore his existence.

When Claparon had made his payments, fear seized upon him. There was no mistake about his power. He went on 'Change again, and offered his bargain to other men in embarrassed circumstances. The Devil's bond, "together with the rights, easements, and privileges appertaining thereunto,"--to use the expression of the notary who succeeded Claparon, changed hands for the sum of seven hundred thousand francs. The notary in his turn parted with the agreement with the Devil for five hundred thousand francs to a building contractor in difficulties, who likewise was rid of it to an iron merchant in consideration of a hundred thousand crowns. In fact, by five o'clock people had ceased to believe in the strange contract, and purchasers were lacking for want of confidence.

At half-past five the holder of the bond was a house painter, who was lounging by the door of the building in the Rue Feydeau, where at that time stockbrokers temporarily congregated. The house painter, simple fellow, could not think what was the matter with him. He "felt all anyhow"; so he told his wife when he went home.

The Rue Feydeau, as idlers about town are aware, is a place of pilgrimage for youths who for lack of a mistress bestow their ardent affection upon the whole sex. On the first floor of the most rigidly respectable domicile therein dwelt one of those exquisite creatures whom it has pleased heaven to endow with the rarest and most surpassing beauty. As it is impossible that they should all be duchesses or queens (since there are many more pretty women in the world than titles and thrones for them to adorn), they are content to make a stockbroker or a banker happy at a fixed price. To this good-natured beauty, Euphrasia by name, an unbounded ambition had led a notary's clerk to aspire. In short, the second clerk in the office of Maître Crottat, notary, had fallen in love with her, as youth at two and twenty can fall in love. The scrivener would have murdered the Pope and run amuck through the

whole sacred college to procure the miserable sum of a hundred louis to pay for a shawl which had turned Euphrasia's head, at which price her waiting woman had promised that Euphrasia should be his. The infatuated youth walked to and fro under Madame Euphrasia's windows, like the polar bears in their cage at the Jardin des Plantes, with his right hand thrust beneath his waistcoat in the region of the heart, which he was fit to tear from his bosom, but as yet he had only wrenched at the elastic of his braces.

"What can one do to raise ten thousand francs?" he asked himself.

"Shall I make off with the money that I must pay on the registration of that conveyance? Good heavens! my loan would not ruin the purchaser, a man with seven millions! And then next day I would fling myself at his feet and say, 'I have taken ten thousand francs belonging to you, sir; I am twenty-two years of age, and I am in love with Euphrasia--that is my story. My father is rich, he will pay you back; do not ruin me! Have not you yourself been twenty-two years old and madly in love?' But these beggarly landowners have no souls! He would be quite likely to give me up to the public prosecutor, instead of taking pity upon me. Good God! if it were only possible to sell your soul to the Devil! But there is neither a God nor a Devil; it is all nonsense out of nursery tales and old wives' talk. What shall I do?"

"If you have a mind to sell your soul to the Devil, sir," said the house painter, who had overheard something that the clerk let fall, "you can have the ten thousand francs."

"And Euphrasia!" cried the clerk, as he struck a bargain with the devil that inhabited the house painter.

The pact concluded, the frantic clerk went to find the shawl, and mounted Madame Euphrasia's staircase; and as (literally) the devil was in him, he did not come down for twelve days, drowning the thought of hell and of his privileges in twelve days of love and riot and forgetfulness, for which he had bartered away all his hopes of a paradise to come.

And in this way the secret of the vast power discovered and acquired by the Irishman, the offspring of Maturin's brain, was lost to mankind; and the various Orientalists, Mystics, and Archaeologists who take an interest in these matters were unable to hand down to posterity the proper method of invoking the Devil, for the following sufficient reasons:--

On the thirteenth day after these frenzied nuptials the wretched clerk lay on a pallet bed in a garret in his master's house in the Rue

Saint-Honoré. Shame, the stupid goddess who dares not behold herself, had taken possession of the young man. He had fallen ill; he would nurse himself; misjudged the quantity of a remedy devised by the skill of a practitioner well known on the walls of Paris, and succumbed to the effects of an overdose of mercury. His corpse was as black as a mole's back. A devil had left unmistakable traces of its passage there; could it have been Ashtaroth?

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"The estimable youth to whom you refer has been carried away to the planet Mercury," said the head clerk to a German demonologist who came to investigate the matter at first hand.

"I am quite prepared to believe it," answered the Teuton.

"Oh!"

"Yes, sir," returned the other. "The opinion you advance coincides with the very words of Jacob Boehme. In the forty-eighth proposition of \_The Threefold Life of Man\_ he says that 'if God hath brought all things to pass with a LET THERE BE, the FIAT is the secret matrix which comprehends and apprehends the nature which is formed by the spirit born of Mercury and of God.'"

"What do you say, sir?"

The German delivered his quotation afresh.

"We do not know it," said the clerks.

"\_Fiat?...\_" said a clerk. "\_Fiat lux!\_"

"You can verify the citation for yourselves," said the German. "You will find the passage in the \_Treatise of the Threefold Life of Man\_, page 75; the edition was published by M. Migneret in 1809. It was translated into French by a philosopher who had a great admiration for the famous shoemaker."

"Oh! he was a shoemaker, was he?" said the head clerk.

"In Prussia," said the German.

"Did he work for the King of Prussia?" inquired a Boeotian of a second clerk.

"He must have vamped up his prose," said a third.

"That man is colossal!" cried the fourth, pointing to the Teuton.

That gentleman, though a demonologist of the first rank, did not know the amount of devilry to be found in a notary's clerk. He went away without the least idea that they were making game of him, and fully under the impression that the young fellows regarded Boehme as a colossal genius.

"Education is making strides in France," said he to himself.

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**RAMA AND LUXMAN; OR, THE LEARNED OWL**, by M. Frere  
from *Old Deccan Days*, EBook #36696

"With a lengthened loud halloo,  
Tuwhoo, tuwhit, tuwhit, tuwhoo."

Once upon a time there was a Rajah whose name was Chandra Rajah, and he had a learned Wuzeer or Minister, named Butti. Their mutual love was so great that they were more like brothers than master and servant. Neither the Rajah nor the Wuzeer had any children, and both were equally anxious to have a son. At last, in one day and one hour, the wife of the Rajah and the wife of the Wuzeer had each a little baby boy. They named the Rajah's son Rama, and the son of the Wuzeer was called Luxman, and there were great rejoicings at the birth of both. The boys grew up and loved each other tenderly: they were never happy unless together; together they went to daily school, together bathed and played, and they would not eat except from off one plate. One day, when Rama Rajah was fifteen years old, his mother, the Ranee, said to Chandra Rajah: "Husband, our son associates too much with low people; for instance, he is always at play with the Wuzeer's son, Luxman, which is not befitting his rank. I wish you would endeavor to put an end to their friendship, and find him better playmates."

Chandra Rajah replied, "I cannot do it: Luxman's father is my very good friend and Wuzeer, as his father's father was to my father; let the sons be the same." This answer annoyed the Ranee, but she said no more to her husband; she sent, however, for all the wise people, and seers, and conjurors in the land, and inquired of them whether there existed no means of dissolving the children's affection for each other; they answered they knew of none. At last one old Nautch woman came to the Ranee and said, "I can do this thing you wish, but for it you must give me a great reward." Then the Ranee gave the old woman an enormous bag full of gold mohurs, and said, "This I give you now, and if you succeed in the undertaking I will give you as much again." So this wicked old woman disguised herself in a very rich dress, and went to a garden-house which Chandra Rajah had built for his son, and where Rama Rajah and Luxman, the young Wuzeer, used to spend the greater part of their playtime. Outside the house was a large well and a fine garden. When the old woman arrived, the two boys were playing cards together in the garden close to the well. She drew near, and began drawing water from it. Rama Rajah looking up, saw her, and said to Luxman, "Go, see who that richly-dressed woman is, and bring me word." The Wuzeer's son did as he was bidden, and asked the woman what she wanted. She answered, "Nothing, oh nothing," and

nodding her head went away; then, returning to the Ranee, she said, "I have done as you wished; give me the promised reward," and the Ranee gave her the second bag of gold. On Luxman's return, the young Rajah said to him, "What did the woman want?" Luxman answered, "She told me she wanted nothing." "It is not true," replied the other, angrily; "I feel certain she must have told you something. Why should she come here for no purpose? It is some secret which you are concealing from me; I insist on knowing it." Luxman vainly protesting his innocence, they quarreled and then fought, and the young Rajah ran home very angry to his father. "What is the matter, my son?" said he. "Father," he answered, "I am angry with the Wuzeer's son. I hate that boy; kill him, and let his eyes be brought to me in proof of his death, or I will not eat my dinner." Chandra Rajah was very much grieved at this, but the young Rajah would eat no dinner, and at last his father said to the Wuzeer, "Take your son away and hide him, for the boys have had a quarrel." Then he went out and shot a deer, and showing its eyes to Rama, said to him, "See, my son, the good Wuzeer's son has by your order been deprived of life," and Rama Rajah was merry, and ate his dinner. But a while after he began to miss his kind playmate; there was nobody he cared for to tell him stories and amuse him. Then for four nights running he dreamed of a beautiful Glass Palace, in which dwelt a Princess white as marble, and he sent for all the wise people in the kingdom to interpret his dream, but none could do it; and, thinking upon this fair princess and his lost friend, he got more and more sad, and said to himself: "There is nobody to help me in this matter. Ah! if my Wuzeer's son were here now, how quickly would he interpret the dream! Oh, my friend, my friend, my dear lost friend!" and when Chandra Rajah, his father, came in, he said to him: "Show me the grave of Luxman, son of the Wuzeer, that I also may die there." His father replied, "What a foolish boy you are! You first begged that the Wuzeer's son might be killed, and now you want to die on his grave. What is all this about?" Rama Rajah replied, "Oh, why did you give the order for him to be put to death? In him I have lost my friend and all my joy in life; show me now his grave, for thereon, I swear, will I kill myself." When the Rajah saw that his son really grieved for the loss of Luxman, he said to him, "You have to thank me for not regarding your foolish wishes; your old playmate is living, therefore be friends again, for what you thought were his eyes were but the eyes of a deer." So the friendship of Rama and Luxman was resumed on its former footing. Then Rama said to Luxman, "Four nights ago I dreamed a strange dream. I thought that for miles and miles I wandered through a dense jungle, after which I came upon a grove of Cocoa-nut trees, passing through which I reached one compound entirely of Guava trees, then one of Soparee trees, and lastly one of Copal trees: beyond this lay a garden of flowers, of which the Malee's wife gave me a bunch; round the garden ran a large river, and on the other

side of this I saw a fair palace composed of transparent glass, and in the centre of it sat the most lovely Princess I ever saw, white as marble and covered with rich jewels; at the sight of her beauty I fainted--and so awoke. This has happened now four times, and as yet I have found no one capable of throwing any light on the vision."

Luxman answered, "I can tell you. There exists a Princess exactly like her you saw in your dreams, and, if you like, you can go and marry her." "How can I?" said Rama; "and what is your interpretation of the dream?" The Wuzeer's son replied, "Listen to me, and I will tell you. In a country very far away from this, in the centre of a great Rajah's kingdom, there dwells his daughter, a most fair Princess; she lives in a glass palace. Round this palace runs a large river, and round the river is a garden of flowers. Round the garden are four thick groves of trees--one of Copal trees, one of Soparee trees, one of Guava trees, and one of Cocoa-nut trees. The Princess is twenty-four years old, but she is not married, for she has determined only to marry whoever can jump this river and greet her in her crystal palace, and though many thousand kings have essayed to do so, they have all perished miserably in the attempt, having either been drowned in the river, or broken their necks by falling; thus all that you dreamed of is perfectly true." "Can we go to this country?" asked the young Rajah. "Oh, yes," his friend replied. "This is what you must do. Go tell your father you wish to see the world. Ask him for neither elephants nor attendants, but beg him to lend you for the journey his old war-horse."

Upon this Rama went to his father, and said, "Father, I pray you give me leave to go and travel with the Wuzeer's son. I desire to see the world." "What would you have for the journey, my son?" said Chandra Rajah; "will you have elephants and how many?--attendants, how many?" "Neither, father," he answered, "give me rather, I pray you, your old war-horse, that I may ride him during the journey." "So be it, my son," he answered, and with that Rama Rajah and Luxman set forth on their travels. After going many, many thousands of miles, to their joy one day they came upon a dense grove of Cocoa-nut trees, and beyond that to a grove of Guava trees, then to one of Soparee trees, and lastly to one of Copal trees; after which they entered a beautiful garden, where the Malee's wife presented them with a large bunch of flowers. Then they knew that they had nearly reached the place where the fair Princess dwelt. Now it happened that, because many kings and great people had been drowned in trying to jump over the river that ran round the Glass Palace where the Princess lived, the Rajah, her father, had made a law that, in future, no aspirants to her hand were to attempt the jump, except at stated times and with his knowledge and permission, and that any Rajahs or Princes found wandering there, contrary to this law, were to be imprisoned. Of this the young Rajah



and the Wuzeer's son knew nothing, and having reached the centre of the garden they found themselves on the banks of a large river, exactly opposite the wondrous Glass Palace, and were just debating what further steps to take, when they were seized by the Rajah's guard, and hurried off to prison.

"This is a hard fate," said Luxman. "Yes," sighed Rama Rajah; "a dismal end, in truth, to all our fine schemes. Would it be possible, think you, to escape?" "I think so," answered Luxman; "at all events, I will try." With that he turned to the sentry who was guarding them, and said, "We are shut in here and can't get out: here is money for you if you will only have the goodness to call out that the Malee's Cow has strayed away." The sentry thought this a very easy way of making a fortune; so he called out as he was bidden, and took the money. The result answered Luxman's anticipations. The Malee's wife, hearing the sentry calling out, thought to herself, "What, sentries round the guard-room again! then there must be prisoners; doubtless they are those two young Rajahs I met in the garden this morning; at least, I will endeavor to release them." So she asked two old beggars to accompany her, and taking with her offerings of flowers and sweetmeats, started as if to go to a little temple which was built within the quadrangle where the prisoners were kept. The sentries, thinking she was only going with two old friends to visit the temple, allowed her to pass without opposition. As soon as she got within the quadrangle she unfastened the prison door, and told the two young men (Rama Rajah and Luxman) to change clothes with the two old beggars, which they instantly did. Then, leaving the beggars in the cell, she conducted Rama and Luxman safely to her house. When they had reached it she said to them, "Young Princes, you must know that you did very wrong in going down to the river before having made a salaam to our Rajah, and gained his consent; and so strict is the law on the subject that had I not assisted your escape, you might have remained a long time in prison; though, as I felt certain you only erred through ignorance, I was the more willing to help you; but to-morrow morning early you must go and pay your respects at court."

Next day the guards brought their two prisoners to the Rajah, saying, "See, O King, here are two young Rajahs whom we caught last night wandering near the river contrary to your law and commandment." But when they came to look at the prisoners, lo and behold! they were only two old beggars whom everybody knew and had often seen at the palace gate.

Then the Rajah laughed and said, "You stupid fellows, you have been over vigilant for once; see here your fine young Rajahs. Don't you yet know the looks of these old beggars?" Whereupon the guards went away

much ashamed of themselves.

Having learnt discretion from the advice of the Malee's wife, Rama and Luxman went betimes that morning to call at the Rajah's palace. The Rajah received them very graciously, but when he heard the object of the journey he shook his head, and said, "My pretty fellows, far be it from me to thwart your intentions, if you are really determined to strive to win my daughter, the Princess Bargaruttee; but as a friend I would counsel you to desist from the attempt. You can find a hundred Princesses elsewhere willing to marry you; why, therefore, come here, where already a thousand Princes as fair as you have lost there lives? Cease to think of my daughter--she is a headstrong girl." But Rama Rajah still declared himself anxious to try and jump the dangerous river, whereupon the Rajah unwillingly consented to his attempting to do so, and caused it to be solemnly proclaimed around the town that another Prince was going to risk his life, begging all good men and true to pray for his success. Then Rama, having dressed gorgeously, and mounted his father's stout war-horse, put spurs to it and galloped to the river. Up, up in the air, like a bird, jumped the good war-horse, right across the river and into the very centre courtyard of the Glass Palace of the Princess Bargaruttee; and, as if ashamed of so poor an exploit, this feat he accomplished three times. At this the heart of the Rajah was glad, and he ran and patted the brave horse, and kissed Rama Rajah, and said, "Welcome, my son-in-law." The wedding took place amid great rejoicings, with feasts, illuminations and much giving of presents, and there Rama Rajah and his wife, the Ranee Bargaruttee, lived happily for some time. At last, one day Rama Rajah said to his father-in-law, "Sire, I have been very happy here, but I have a great desire to see my father and my mother, and my own land again." To which the Rajah replied, "My son, you are free to go; but I have no son but you, nor daughter but your wife: therefore, as it grieves me to lose sight of you, come back now and then to see me and rejoice my heart. My doors are ever open to you; you will be always welcome."

Rama Rajah promised to return occasionally; and then, being given many rich gifts by the old Rajah, and supplied with all things needful for the journey, he, with his beautiful wife Bargaruttee, his friend the young Wuzeer, and a great retinue, set out to return home. Before going, Rama Rajah and Luxman richly rewarded the kind Malee's wife, who had helped them so ably. On the first evening of their march the travelers reached the borders of the Cocoa-nut grove, on the outskirts of the jungle; here they determined to halt and rest for the night. Rama Rajah and the Ranee Bargaruttee went to their tent; but Luxman (whose tender love for them was so great that he usually watched all night through at their door), was sitting under a large tree close by,

when two little owls flew over his head, and perching on one of the highest branches, began chattering to each other.[53] The Wuzeer's son, who was in many ways wiser than most men, could understand their language. To his surprise he heard the little lady owl say to her husband, "I wish you would tell me a story, my dear, it is such a long time since I have heard one." To which her husband, the other little owl, answered, "A story! what story can I tell you? Do you see these people encamped under our tree? Would you like to hear their story?" She assented; and he began: "See first this poor Wuzeer; he is a good and faithful man, and has done much for this young Rajah, but neither has that been to his advantage heretofore, nor will it be hereafter." At this Luxman listened more attentively, and taking out his writing tablets determined to note down all he heard. The little owl commenced with the story of the birth of Rama and Luxman, of their friendship, their quarrel, the young Rajah's dream, and their reconciliation, and then told of their subsequent adventures in search of the Princess Bargaruttee, down to that very day on which they were journeying home. "And what more has Fate in store for this poor Wuzeer?" asked the lady owl. "From this place," replied her husband, "he will journey on with the young Rajah and Raneer, until they get very near Chandra Rajah's dominions; there, as the whole cavalcade is about to pass under a large Banyan tree, this Wuzeer Luxman will notice some of the topmost branches swaying about in a dangerous manner; he will hurry the Rajah and Raneer away from it, and the tree (which would otherwise have inevitably killed them,) will fall to the ground with a tremendous crash; but even his having thus saved the Rajah's life shall not avert his fate." (All this the Wuzeer noted down.) "And what next?" said the wife, "what next?" "Next," continued the wise little story-teller, "next, just as the Rajah Rama and the Raneer Bargaruttee and all their suite are passing under the palace door-way, the Wuzeer will notice that the arch is insecure, and by dragging them quickly through, prevent their being crushed in its fall." "And what will he do after that, dear husband?" she asked. "After that," he went on, "when the Rajah and Raneer are asleep, and the Wuzeer Luxman keeping guard over them, he will perceive a large cobra slowly crawling down the wall and drawing nearer and nearer to the Raneer. He will kill it with his sword, but a drop of the cobra's blood shall fall on the Raneer's white forehead. The Wuzeer will not dare to wipe the blood off her forehead with his hand, but shall instead cover his face with a cloth that he may lick it off with his tongue; but for this the Rajah will be angry with him, and his reproaches will turn this poor Wuzeer into stone."

"Will he always remain stone?" asked the lady owl. "Not for ever," answered the husband, "but for eight long years he will remain so." "And what then?" demanded she. "Then," answered the other, "when the

young Rajah and Ranee have a baby, it shall come to pass that one day the child shall be playing on the floor, and to help itself along shall clasp hold of the stony figure, and at that baby's touch the Wuzeer will come to life again. But I have told you enough for one night; come, let's catch mice--tuwhit, tuwhoo, tuwhoo," and away flew the owls. Luxman had written down all he heard, and it made him heavy-hearted, but he thought, "Perhaps, after all, this may not be true." So he said nothing about it to any living soul. Next day they continued their journey, and as the owl had prophesied, so events fell out. For, as the whole party were passing under a large Banyan tree, the Wuzeer noticed that it looked unsafe. "The owl spake truly," he thought to himself, and, seizing the Rajah and Ranee, he hurried them from under it, just as a huge limb of the tree fell prone with a fearful crash.

A little while after, having reached Chandra Rajah's dominions, they were just going under the great arch of the palace courtyard, when the Wuzeer noticed some of the stones tottering. "The owl was a true prophet," thought he again, and catching hold of the hands of Rama Rajah and Bargaruttee Ranee, he pulled them rapidly through, just in time to save their lives. "Pardon me," he said to the Rajah, "that unbidden I dared thus to touch your hand and that of the Ranee, but I saw the danger imminent." So they reached home, where they were joyfully welcomed by Chandra Rajah, the Ranee, the Wuzeer (Luxman's father), and all the court.

A few nights afterward, when the Rajah and Ranee were asleep, and the young Wuzeer keeping guard over them as he was wont, he saw a large black cobra stealthily creeping down the wall just above the Ranee's head. "Alas!" he thought, "then such is my fate, and so it must be; nevertheless, I will do my duty," and, taking from the folds of his dress the history of his and the young Rajah's life, from their boyhood down to that very time (as he had written it from the owl's narrative), he laid it beside the sleeping Rama, and drawing his sword, killed the cobra. A few drops of the serpent's blood fell on the Ranee's forehead: the Wuzeer did not dare to touch it with his hand, but, that her sacred brow might not be defiled with the vile cobra's blood, he reverently covered his face and mouth with a cloth to lick the drops of blood away. At this moment the Rajah started up, and seeing him, said: "O Wuzeer, Wuzeer, is this well done of you? O Luxman, who have been to me as a brother, who have saved me from so many difficulties, why do you treat me thus, to kiss her holy forehead? If indeed you loved her (as who could help it?), could you not have told me when we first saw her in that Glass Palace, and I would have exiled myself that she might be your wife? O my brother, my brother, why did you mock me thus?" The Rajah had buried his face in

his hands; he looked up, he turned to the Wuzeer, but from him came neither answer nor reply. He had become a senseless stone. Then Rama for the first time perceived the roll of paper which Luxman had laid beside him, and when he read in it of what Luxman had been to him from boyhood, and of the end, his bitter grief broke through all bounds; and, falling at the feet of the statue, he clasped its stony knees and wept aloud. When daylight dawned, Chandra Rajah and the Ranee found Rama still weeping and hugging the stone, asking its forgiveness with penitent cries and tears. Then they said to him, "What is this you have done?" When he told them, the Rajah his father was very angry, and said: "Was it not enough that you should have once before unjustly desired the death of this good man, but that now by your rash reproaches you should have turned him into stone? Go to; you do but continually what is evil."

Now eight long years rolled by without the Wuzeer returning to his original form, although every day Rama Rajah and Bargaruttee Ranee would watch beside him, kissing his cold hands, and adjuring him by all endearing names to forgive them and return to them again. When eight years had expired, Rama and Bargaruttee had a child; and from the time it was nine months old and first began to try and crawl about, the father and mother would sit and watch beside it, placing it near the Wuzeer's statue, in hopes that the baby would some day touch it as the owl had foretold.

But for three months they watched in vain. At last, one day when the child was a year old, and was trying to walk, it chanced to be close to the statue, and tottering on its unsteady feet, stretched out its tiny hands and caught hold of the foot of the statue. The Wuzeer instantly came back to life, and stooping down seized the little baby who had rescued him in his arms, and kissed it. It is impossible to describe the delight of Rama Rajah and his wife at regaining their long-lost friend. The old Rajah and Ranee rejoiced also, with the Wuzeer (Luxman Wuzeer's father), and his mother.

Then Chandra Rajah said to the Wuzeer: "Here is my boy happy with his wife and child, while your son has neither; go fetch him a wife, and we will have a right merry wedding."

So the Wuzeer of the Rajah fetched for his son a kind and beautiful wife, and Chandra Rajah and Rama Rajah caused the wedding of Luxman to be grander than that of any great Rajah before or since, even as if he had been a son of the royal house; and they all lived very happy ever after, as all good fathers, and mothers, and husbands, and wives, and children do.

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I

They were walking home from the theatre.

'Well, Mr White,' said Valeria, 'I think it was just fine.'

'It was magnificent!' replied Mr White.

And they were separated for a moment by the crowd, streaming up from the Français towards the Opera and the Boulevards.

'I think, if you don't mind,' she said, 'I'll take your arm, so that we shouldn't get lost.'

He gave her his arm, and they walked through the Louvre and over the river on their way to the Latin Quarter.

Valeria was an art student and Ferdinand White was a poet. Ferdinand considered Valeria the only woman who had ever been able to paint, and Valeria told Ferdinand that he was the only man she had met who knew anything about Art without being himself an artist. On her arrival in Paris, a year before, she had immediately inscribed herself, at the offices of the New York Herald, Valeria Stewart, Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. She settled down in a respectable pension, and within a week was painting vigorously. Ferdinand White arrived from Oxford at about the same time, hired a dirty room in a shabby hotel, ate his meals at cheap restaurants in the Boulevard St Michel, read Stephen Mallarmé, and flattered himself that he was leading 'la vie de Bohème.'

After two months, the Fates brought the pair together, and Ferdinand began to take his meals at Valeria's pension. They went to the museums together; and in the Sculpture Gallery at the Louvre, Ferdinand would discourse on ancient Greece in general and on Plato in particular, while among the pictures Valeria would lecture on tones and values and chiaroscuro. Ferdinand renounced Ruskin and all his works; Valeria read the Symposium. Frequently in the evening they went to the theatre; sometimes to the Français, but more often to the Odéon; and after the performance they would discuss the play, its art, its technique—above all, its ethics. Ferdinand explained the piece he had in contemplation, and Valeria talked of the picture she meant to paint for next year's Salon; and the lady told her friends that her companion was the cleverest man she had met in her life, while he told his that she was the only really sympathetic and intelligent girl he had ever known. Thus were united in bonds of amity, Great Britain on the one side and the United States of America and Ireland on the other.

But when Ferdinand spoke of Valeria to the few Frenchmen he knew, they asked him,—

'But this Miss Stewart—is she pretty?'

'Certainly—in her American way; a long face, with the hair parted in the middle and hanging over the nape of the neck. Her mouth is quite classic.'

'And have you never kissed the classic mouth?'

'I? Never!'

'Has she a good figure?'

'Admirable!'

'And yet—Oh, you English!' And they smiled and shrugged their shoulders as they said, 'How English!'

'But, my good fellow,' cried Ferdinand, in execrable French, 'you don't understand. We are friends, the best of friends.'

They shrugged their shoulders more despairingly than ever.

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## II

They stood on the bridge and looked at the water and the dark masses of the houses on the Latin side, with the twin towers of Notre Dame rising dimly behind them. Ferdinand thought of the Thames at night, with the barges gliding slowly down, and the twinkling of the lights along the Embankment.

'It must be a little like that in Holland,' she said, 'but without the lights and with greater stillness.'

'When do you start?'

She had been making preparations for spending the summer in a little village near Amsterdam, to paint.

'I can't go now,' cried Valentia. 'Corrie Sayles is going home, and there's no one else I can go with. And I can't go alone. Where are you going?'

'I? I have no plans.... I never make plans.'

They paused, looking at the reflections in the water. Then she said,—

'I don't see why you shouldn't come to Holland with me!'

He did not know what to think; he knew she had been reading the Symposium.

'After all,' she said, 'there's no reason why one shouldn't go away with a man as well as with a woman.'

His French friends would have suggested that there were many reasons why one should go away with a woman rather than a man; but, like his companion, Ferdinand looked at it in the light of pure friendship.

'When one comes to think of it, I really don't see why we shouldn't. And the mere fact of staying at the same hotel can make no difference to either of us. We shall both have our work—you your painting, and I my play.'

As they considered it, the idea was distinctly pleasing; they wondered that it had not occurred to them before. Sauntering homewards, they discussed the details, and in half an hour had decided on the plan of their journey, the date and the train.

Next day Valentia went to say good-bye to the old French painter whom all the American girls called Popper. She found him in a capacious dressing-gown, smoking cigarettes.

'Well, my dear,' he said, 'what news?'

'I'm going to Holland to paint windmills.'

'A very laudable ambition. With your mother?'

'My good Popper, my mother's in Cincinnati. I'm going with Mr White.'

'With Mr White?' He raised his eyebrows. 'You are very frank about it.'

'Why—what do you mean?'

He put on his glasses and looked at her carefully.

'Does it not seem to you a rather—curious thing for a young girl of your age to go away with a young man of the age of Mr Ferdinand White?'

'Good gracious me! One would think I was doing something that had never been done before!'

'Oh, many a young man has gone travelling with a young woman, but they generally start by a night train, and arrive at the station in different cabs.'

'But surely, Popper, you don't mean to insinuate—Mr White and I are going to Holland as



friends.'

'Friends!'

He looked at her more curiously than ever.

'One can have a man friend as well as a girl friend,' she continued. 'And I don't see why he shouldn't be just as good a friend.'

'The danger is that he become too good.'

'You misunderstand me entirely, Popper; we are friends, and nothing but friends.'

'You are entirely off your head, my child.'

'Ah! you're a Frenchman, you can't understand these things. We are different.'

'I imagine that you are human beings, even though England and America respectively had the intense good fortune of seeing your birth.'

'We're human beings—and more than that, we're nineteenth century human beings. Love is not everything. It is a part of one—perhaps the lower part—an accessory to man's life, needful for the continuation of the species.'

'You use such difficult words, my dear.'

'There is something higher and nobler and purer than love—there is friendship. Ferdinand White is my friend. I have the amplest confidence in him. I am certain that no unclean thought has ever entered his head.'

She spoke quite heatedly, and as she flushed up, the old painter thought her astonishingly handsome. Then she added as an afterthought,—

'We despise passion. Passion is ugly; it is grotesque.'

The painter stroked his imperial and faintly smiled.

'My child, you must permit me to tell you that you are foolish. Passion is the most lovely thing in the world; without it we should not paint beautiful pictures. It is passion that makes a woman of a society lady; it is passion that makes a man even of—an art critic.'

'We do not want it,' she said. 'We worship Venus Urania. We are all spirit and soul.'

'You have been reading Plato; soon you will read Zola.'

He smiled again, and lit another cigarette.

'Do you disapprove of my going?' she asked after a little silence.

He paused and looked at her. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

'On the contrary, I approve. It is foolish, but that is no reason why you should not do it. After all, folly is the great attribute of man. No judge is as grave as an owl; no soldier fighting for his country flies as rapidly as the hare. You may be strong, but you are not so strong as a horse; you may be gluttonous, but you cannot eat like a boa-constrictor. But there is no beast that can be as foolish as man. And since one should always do what one can do best—be foolish. Strive for folly above all things. Let the height of your ambition be the pointed cap with the golden bells. So, bon voyage! I will come and see you off to-morrow.'

The painter arrived at the station with a box of sweets, which he handed to Valentia with a smile. He shook Ferdinand's hand warmly and muttered under his breath,—

'Silly fool! he's thinking of friendship, too!'

Then, as the train steamed out, he waved his hand and cried,—

'Be foolish! Be foolish!'

He walked slowly out of the station, and sat down at a café. He lit a cigarette, and, sipping his absinthe, said,—

'Imbeciles!'

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### III

They arrived at Amsterdam in the evening, and, after dinner, gathered together their belongings and crossed the Ij as the moon shone over the waters; then they got into the little steam tram and started for Monnickendam. They stood side by side on the platform of the carriage and watched the broad meadows bathed in moonlight, the formless shapes of the cattle lying on the grass, and the black outlines of the mills; they passed by a long, sleeping canal, and they stopped at little, silent villages. At last they entered the dead town, and the tram put them down at the hotel door.

Next morning, when she was half dressed, Valentia threw open the window of her room, and looked out into the garden. Ferdinand was walking about, dressed as befitted the place and season—in flannels—with a huge white hat on his head. She could not help thinking him very handsome—and she took off the blue skirt she had intended to work in, and put on a dress of muslin all bespattered with coloured flowers, and she took in her hand a flat

straw hat with red ribbons.

'You look like a Dresden shepherdess,' he said, as they met.

They had breakfast in the garden beneath the trees; and as she poured out his tea, she laughed, and with the American accent which he was beginning to think made English so harmonious, said,—

'I reckon this about takes the shine out of Paris.'

They had agreed to start work at once, losing no time, for they wanted to have a lot to show on their return to France, that their scheme might justify itself. Ferdinand wished to accompany Valentia on her search for the picturesque, but she would not let him; so, after breakfast, he sat himself down in the summer-house, and spread out all round him his nice white paper, lit his pipe, cut his quills, and proceeded to the evolution of a masterpiece. Valentia tied the red strings of her sun-bonnet under her chin, selected a sketchbook, and sallied forth.

At luncheon they met, and Valentia told of a little bit of canal, with an old windmill on one side of it, which she had decided to paint, while Ferdinand announced that he had settled on the names of his dramatis personæ. In the afternoon they returned to their work, and at night, tired with the previous day's travelling, went to bed soon after dinner.

So passed the second day; and the third day, and the fourth; till the end of the week came, and they had worked diligently. They were both of them rather surprised at the ease with which they became accustomed to their life.

'How absurd all this fuss is,' said Valentia, 'that people make about the differences of the sexes! I am sure it is only habit.'

'We have ourselves to prove that there is nothing in it,' he replied. 'You know, it is an interesting experiment that we are making.'

She had not looked at it in that light before.

'Perhaps it is. We may be the fore-runners of a new era.'

'The Edisons of a new communion!'

'I shall write and tell Monsieur Rollo all about it.'

In the course of the letter, she said,—

'Sex is a morbid instinct. Out here, in the calmness of the canal and the broad meadows, it never enters one's head. I do not think of Ferdinand as a man—'

She looked up at him as she wrote the words. He was reading a book and she saw him in profile, with the head bent down. Through the leaves the sun lit up his face with a soft light that was almost green, and it occurred to her that it would be interesting to paint him.

'I do not think of Ferdinand as a man; to me he is a companion. He has a wider experience than a woman, and he talks of different things. Otherwise I see no difference. On his part, the idea of my sex never occurs to him, and far from being annoyed as an ordinary woman might be, I am proud of it. It shows me that, when I chose a companion, I chose well. To him I am not a woman; I am a man.'

And she finished with a repetition of Ferdinand's remark,—

'We are the Edisons of a new communion!'

When Valentia began to paint her companion's portrait, they were naturally much more together. And they never grew tired of sitting in the pleasant garden under the trees, while she worked at her canvas and green shadows fell on the profile of Ferdinand White. They talked of many things. After a while they became less reserved about their private concerns. Valentia told Ferdinand about her home in Ohio, and about her people; and Ferdinand spoke of the country parsonage in which he had spent his childhood, and the public school, and lastly of Oxford and the strange, happy days when he had learnt to read Plato and Walter Pater....

At last Valentia threw aside her brushes and leant back with a sigh.

'It is finished!'

Ferdinand rose and stretched himself, and went to look at his portrait. He stood before it for a while, and then he placed his hand on Valentia's shoulder.

'You are a genius, Miss Stewart.'

She looked up at him.

'Ah, Mr White, I was inspired by you. It is more your work than mine.'

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#### IV

In the evening they went out for a stroll. They wandered through the silent street; in the darkness they lost the quaintness of the red brick houses, contrasting with the bright yellow of the paving, but it was even quieter than by day. The street was very broad, and it wound about from east to west and from west to east, and at last it took them to the tiny harbour. Two fishing smacks were basking on the water, moored to the side, and the

Zuyder Zee was covered with the innumerable reflections of the stars. On one of the boats a man was sitting at the prow, fishing, and now and then, through the darkness, one saw the red glow of his pipe; by his side, huddled up on a sail, lay a sleeping boy. The other boat seemed deserted. Ferdinand and Valentia stood for a long time watching the fisher, and he was so still that they wondered whether he too were sleeping. They looked across the sea, and in the distance saw the dim lights of Marken, the island of fishers. They wandered on again through the street, and now the lights in the windows were extinguished one by one, and sleep came over the town; and the quietness was even greater than before. They walked on, and their footsteps made no sound. They felt themselves alone in the dead city, and they did not speak.

At length they came to a canal gliding towards the sea; they followed it inland, and here the darkness was equal to the silence. Great trees that had been planted when William of Orange was king in England threw their shade over the water, shutting out the stars. They wandered along on the soft earth, they could not hear themselves walk—and they did not speak.

They came to a bridge over the canal and stood on it, looking at the water and the trees above them, and the water and the trees below them—and they did not speak.

Then out of the darkness came another darkness, and gradually loomed forth the heaviness of a barge. Noiselessly it glided down the stream, very slowly; at the end of it a boy stood at the tiller, steering; and it passed beneath them and beyond, till it lost itself in the night, and again they were alone.

They stood side by side, leaning against the parapet, looking down at the water.... And from the water rose up Love, and Love fluttered down from the trees, and Love was borne along upon the night air. Ferdinand did not know what was happening to him; he felt Valentia by his side, and he drew closer to her, till her dress touched his legs and the silk of her sleeve rubbed against his arm. It was so dark that he could not see her face; he wondered of what she was thinking. She made a little movement and to him came a faint wave of the scent she wore. Presently two forms passed by on the bank and they saw a lover with his arm round a girl's waist, and then they too were hidden in the darkness. Ferdinand trembled as he spoke.

'Only Love is waking!'

'And we!' she said.

'And—you!'

He wondered why she said nothing. Did she understand? He put his hand on her arm.

'Valentia!'

He had never called her by her Christian name before. She turned her face towards him.

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, Valentia, I love you! I can't help it.'

A sob burst from her.

'Didn't you understand,' he said, 'all those hours that I sat for you while you painted, and these long nights in which we wandered by the water?'

'I thought you were my friend.'

'I thought so too. When I sat before you and watched you paint, and looked at your beautiful hair and your eyes, I thought I was your friend. And I looked at the lines of your body beneath your dress. And when it pleased me to carry your easel and walk with you, I thought it was friendship. Only to-night I know I am in love. Oh, Valentia, I am so glad!'

She could not keep back her tears. Her bosom heaved, and she wept.

'You are a woman,' he said. 'Did you not see?'

'I am so sorry,' she said, her voice all broken. 'I thought we were such good friends. I was so happy. And now you have spoilt it all.'

'Valentia, I love you.'

'I thought our friendship was so good and pure. And I felt so strong in it. It seemed to me so beautiful.'

'Did you think I was less a man than the fisherman you see walking beneath the trees at night?'

'It is all over now,' she sighed.

'What do you mean?'

'I can't stay here with you alone.'

'You're not going away?'

'Before, there was no harm in our being together at the hotel; but now—'

'Oh, Valentia, don't leave me. I can't—I can't live without you.'

She heard the unhappiness in his voice. She turned to him again and laid her two hands on his shoulders.

'Why can't you forget it all, and let us be good friends again? Forget that you are a man. A woman can remain with a man for ever, and always be content to walk and read and talk with him, and never think of anything else. Can you forget it, Ferdinand? You will make me so happy.'

He did not answer, and for a long time they stood on the bridge in silence. At last he sighed—a heartbroken sigh.

'Perhaps you're right. It may be better to pretend that we are friends. If you like, we will forget all this.'

Her heart was too full; she could not answer; but she held out her hands to him. He took them in his own, and, bending down, kissed them.

Then they walked home, side by side, without speaking.

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V

Next morning Valentia received M. Rollo's answer to her letter. He apologised for his delay in answering.

'You are a philosopher,' he said—she could see the little snigger with which he had written the words—'You are a philosopher, and I was afraid lest my reply should disturb the course of your reflections on friendship. I confess that I did not entirely understand your letter, but I gathered that the sentiments were correct, and it gave me great pleasure to know that your experiment has had such excellent results. I gather that you have not yet discovered that there is more than a verbal connection between Friendship and Love.'

The reference is to the French equivalents of those states of mind.

'But to speak seriously, dear child. You are young and beautiful now, but not so very many years shall pass before your lovely skin becomes coarse and muddy, and your teeth yellow, and the wrinkles appear about your mouth and eyes. You have not so very many years before you in which to collect sensations, and the recollection of one's loves is, perhaps, the greatest pleasure left to one's old age. To be virtuous, my dear, is admirable, but there are so many interpretations of virtue. For myself, I can say that I have never regretted the temptations to which I succumbed, but often the temptations I have resisted. Therefore, love, love, love! And remember that if love at sixty in a man is sometimes pathetic, in a woman at forty it is always ridiculous. Therefore, take your youth in both hands and say to yourself, "Life is short, but let me live before I die!"'

She did not show the letter to Ferdinand.

Next day it rained. Valentia retired to a room at the top of the house and began to paint, but the incessant patter on the roof got on her nerves; the painting bored her, and she threw aside the brushes in disgust. She came downstairs and found Ferdinand in the dining-room, standing at the window looking at the rain. It came down in one continual steady pour, and the water ran off the raised brickwork of the middle of the street to the gutters by the side, running along in a swift and murky rivulet. The red brick of the opposite house looked cold and cheerless in the wet.... He did not turn or speak to her as she came in. She remarked that it did not look like leaving off. He made no answer. She drew a chair to the second window and tried to read, but she could not understand what she was reading. And she looked out at the pouring rain and the red brick house opposite. She wondered why he had not answered.

The innkeeper brought them their luncheon. Ferdinand took no notice of the preparations.

'Will you come to luncheon, Mr White?' she said to him. 'It is quite ready.'

'I beg your pardon,' he said gravely, as he took his seat.

He looked at her quickly, and then immediately dropping his eyes, began eating. She wished he would not look so sad; she was very sorry for him.

She made an observation and he appeared to rouse himself. He replied and they began talking, very calmly and coldly, as if they had not known one another five minutes. They talked of Art with the biggest of A's, and they compared Dutch painting with Italian; they spoke of Rembrandt and his life.

'Rembrandt had passion,' said Ferdinand, bitterly, 'and therefore he was unhappy. It is only the sexless, passionless creature, the block of ice, that can be happy in this world.'

She blushed and did not answer.

The afternoon Valentia spent in her room, pretending to write letters, and she wondered whether Ferdinand was wishing her downstairs.

At dinner they sought refuge in abstractions. They talked of dykes and windmills and cigars, the history of Holland and its constitution, the constitution of the United States and the edifying spectacle of the politics of that blessed country. They talked of political economy and pessimism and cattle rearing, the state of agriculture in England, the foreign policy of the day, Anarchism, the President of the French Republic. They would have talked of bi-metallism if they could. People hearing them would have thought them very learned and extraordinarily staid.

At last they separated, and as she undressed Valentia told herself that Ferdinand had kept his promise. Everything was just as it had been before, and the only change was that he used her Christian name. And she rather liked him to call her Valentia.



But next day Ferdinand did not seem able to command himself. When Valentia addressed him, he answered in monosyllables, with eyes averted; but when she had her back turned, she felt that he was looking at her. After breakfast she went away painting haystacks, and was late for luncheon.

She apologised.

'It is of no consequence,' he said, keeping his eyes on the ground. And those were the only words he spoke to her during the remainder of the day. Once, when he was looking at her surreptitiously, and she suddenly turned round, their eyes met, and for a moment he gazed straight at her, then walked away. She wished he would not look so sad. As she was going to bed, she held out her hand to him to say good-night, and she added,—

'I don't want to make you unhappy, Mr White. I'm very sorry.'

'It's not your fault,' he said. 'You can't help it, if you're a stock and a stone.'

He went away without taking the proffered hand. Valentia cried that night.

In the morning she found a note outside her door:—

'Pardon me if I was rude, but I was not master of myself. I am going to Volendam; I hate Monnickendam.'

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## VI

Ferdinand arrived at Volendam. It was a fishing village, only three miles across country from Monnickendam, but the route, by steam tram and canal, was so circuitous, that, with luggage, it took one two hours to get from place to place. He had walked over there with Valentia, and it had almost tempted them to desert Monnickendam. Ferdinand took a room at the hotel and walked out, trying to distract himself. The village consisted of a couple of score of houses, built round a semi-circular dyke against the sea, and in the semi-circle lay the fleet of fishing boats. Men and women were sitting at their doors mending nets. He looked at the fishermen, great, sturdy fellows, with rough, weather-beaten faces, huge earrings dangling from their ears. He took note of their quaint costume—black stockings and breeches, the latter more baggy than a Turk's, and the crushed strawberry of their high jackets, cut close to the body. He remembered how he had looked at them with Valentia, and the group of boys and men that she had sketched. He remembered how they walked along, peeping into the houses, where everything was spick and span, as only a Dutch cottage can be, with old Delft plates hanging on the walls, and pots and pans of polished brass. And he looked over the sea to the island of Marken, with its masts crowded together, like a forest without leaf or branch. Coming to the end of the little town he saw

the church of Monnickendam, the red steeple half-hidden by the trees. He wondered where Valentia was—what she was doing.

But he turned back resolutely, and, going to his room, opened his books and began reading. He rubbed his eyes and frowned, in order to fix his attention, but the book said nothing but Valentia. At last he threw it aside and took his Plato and his dictionary, commencing to translate a difficult passage, word for word. But whenever he looked up a word he could only see Valentia, and he could not make head or tail of the Greek. He threw it aside also, and set out walking. He walked as hard as he could—away from Monnickendam.

The second day was not quite so difficult, and he read till his mind was dazed, and then he wrote letters home and told them he was enjoying himself tremendously, and he walked till he felt his legs dropping off.

Next morning it occurred to him that Valentia might have written. Trembling with excitement, he watched the postman coming down the street—but he had no letter for Ferdinand. There would be no more post that day.

But the next day Ferdinand felt sure there would be a letter for him; the postman passed by the hotel door without stopping. Ferdinand thought he should go mad. All day he walked up and down his room, thinking only of Valentia. Why did she not write?

The night fell and he could see from his window the moon shining over the clump of trees about Monnickendam church—he could stand it no longer. He put on his hat and walked across country; the three miles were endless; the church and the trees seemed to grow no nearer, and at last, when he thought himself close, he found he had a bay to walk round, and it appeared further away than ever.

He came to the mouth of the canal along which he and Valentia had so often walked. He looked about, but he could see no one. His heart beat as he approached the little bridge, but Valentia was not there. Of course she would not come out alone. He ran to the hotel and asked for her. They told him she was not in. He walked through the town; not a soul was to be seen. He came to the church; he walked round, and then—right at the edge of the trees—he saw a figure sitting on a bench.

She was dressed in the same flowered dress which she had worn when he likened her to a Dresden shepherdess; she was looking towards Volendam.

He went up to her silently. She sprang up with a little shriek.

'Ferdinand!'

'Oh, Valentia, I cannot help it. I could not remain away any longer. I could do nothing but think of you all day, all night. If you knew how I loved you! Oh, Valentia, have pity on me! I cannot be your friend. It's all nonsense about friendship; I hate it. I can only love

you. I love you with all my heart and soul, Valentia.'

She was frightened.

'Oh! how can you stand there so coldly and watch my agony? Don't you see? How can you be so cold?'

'I am not cold, Ferdinand,' she said, trembling. 'Do you think I have been happy while you were away?'

'Valentia!'

'I thought of you, too, Ferdinand, all day, all night. And I longed for you to come back. I did not know till you went that—I loved you.'

'Oh, Valentia!'

He took her in his arms and pressed her passionately to him.

'No, for God's sake!'

She tore herself away. But again he took her in his arms, and this time he kissed her on the mouth. She tried to turn her face away.

'I shall kill myself, Ferdinand!'

'What do you mean?'

'In those long hours that I sat here looking towards you, I felt I loved you—I loved you as passionately as you said you loved me. But if you came back, and—anything happened—I swore that I would throw myself in the canal.'

He looked at her.

'I could not—live afterwards,' she said hoarsely. 'It would be too horrible. I should be—oh, I can't think of it!'

He took her in his arms again and kissed her.

'Have mercy on me!' she cried.

'You love me, Valentia.'

'Oh, it is nothing to you. Afterwards you will be just the same as before. Why cannot men love peacefully like women? I should be so happy to remain always as we are now, and never change. I tell you I shall kill myself.'

'I will do as you do, Valentia.'

'You?'

'If anything happens, Valentia,' he said gravely, 'we will go down to the canal together.'

She was horrified at the idea; but it fascinated her.

'I should like to die in your arms,' she said.

For the second time he bent down and took her hands and kissed them. Then she went alone into the silent church, and prayed.

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## VII

They went home. Ferdinand was so pleased to be at the hotel again, near her. His bed seemed so comfortable; he was so happy, and he slept, dreaming of Valentia.

The following night they went for their walk, arm in arm; and they came to the canal. From the bridge they looked at the water. It was very dark; they could not hear it flow. No stars were reflected in it, and the trees by its side made the depth seem endless. Valentia shuddered. Perhaps in a little while their bodies would be lying deep down in the water. And they would be in one another's arms, and they would never be separated. Oh, what a price it was to pay! She looked tearfully at Ferdinand, but he was looking down at the darkness beneath them, and he was intensely grave.

And they wandered there by day and looked at the black reflection of the trees. And in the heat it seemed so cool and restful....

They abandoned their work. What did pictures and books matter now? They sauntered about the meadows, along shady roads; they watched the black and white cows sleepily browsing, sometimes coming to the water's edge to drink, and looking at themselves, amazed. They saw the huge-limbed milkmaids come along with their little stools and their pails, deftly tying the cow's hind legs that it might not kick. And the steaming milk frothed into the pails and was poured into huge barrels, and as each cow was freed, she shook herself a little and recommenced to browse.

And they loved their life as they had never loved it before.

One evening they went again to the canal and looked at the water, but they seemed to have lost their emotions before it. They were no longer afraid. Ferdinand sat on the parapet and Valentia leaned against him. He bent his head so that his face might touch her hair. She

looked at him and smiled, and she almost lifted her lips. He kissed them.

'Do you love me, Ferdinand?'

He gave the answer without words.

Their faces were touching now, and he was holding her hands. They were both very happy.

'You know, Ferdinand,' she whispered, 'we are very foolish.'

'I don't care.'

'Monsieur Rollo said that folly was the chief attribute of man.'

'What did he say of love?'

'I forget.'

Then, after a pause, he whispered in her ear,—

'I love you!'

And she held up her lips to him again.

'After all,' she said, 'we're only human beings. We can't help it. I think—'

She hesitated; what she was going to say had something of the anti-climax in it.

'I think—it would be very silly if—if we threw ourselves in the horrid canal.'

'Valentia, do you mean—?'

She smiled charmingly as she answered,—

'What you will, Ferdinand.'

Again he took both her hands, and, bending down, kissed them.... But this time she lifted him up to her and kissed him on the lips.

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## VIII

One night after dinner I told this story to my aunt.

'But why on earth didn't they get married?' she asked, when I had finished.

'Good Heavens!' I cried. 'It never occurred to me.'

'Well, I think they ought,' she said.

'Oh, I have no doubt they did. I expect they got on their bikes and rode off to the Consulate at Amsterdam there and then. I'm sure it would have been his first thought.'

'Of course, some girls are very queer,' said my aunt.

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I

*HOW I OBTAINED IT*

Leaving the dock gates behind me I tramped through the steady drizzle, going parallel with the river and making for the Chinese quarter. The hour was about half-past eleven on one of those September nights when, in such a locality as this, a stifling quality seems to enter the atmosphere, rendering it all but unbreathable. A mist floated over the river, and it was difficult to say if the rain was still falling, indeed, or if the ample moisture upon my garments was traceable only to the fog. Sounds were muffled, lights dimmed, and the frequent hooting of sirens from the river added another touch of weirdness to the scene.

Even when the peculiar duties of my friend, Paul Harley, called him away from England, the lure of this miniature Orient which I had first explored under his guidance, often called me from my chambers. In the house with the two doors in Wade Street, Limehouse, I would discard the armour of respectability, and, dressed in a manner unlikely to provoke comment in dockland, would haunt those dreary ways sometimes from midnight until close upon dawn. Yet, well as I knew the district and the strange and often dangerous creatures lurking in its many burrows, I experienced a chill partly physical and partly of apprehension to-night; indeed, strange though it may sound, I hastened my footsteps in order the sooner to reach the low den for which I was bound--Malay Jack's--a spot marked plainly on the crimes-map and which few respectable travellers would have regarded as a haven of refuge.

But the chill of the adjacent river, and some quality of utter desolation which seemed to emanate from the deserted wharves and ramshackle buildings about me, were driving me thither now; for I knew that human companionship, of a sort, and a glass of good liquor--from a store which the Customs would have been happy to locate--awaited me there. I might chance, too, upon Durham or Wessex, of New Scotland Yard, both good friends of mine, or even upon the Terror of Chinatown, Chief Inspector Kerry, a man for whom I had an esteem which none of his ungracious manners could diminish.

I was just about to turn to the right into a narrow and nameless alley, lying at right angles to the Thames, when I pulled up sharply, clenching my fists and listening.

A confused and continuous sound, not unlike that which might be occasioned by several large and savage hounds at close grips, was proceeding out of the darkness ahead of me; a worrying, growling, and scuffling which presently I identified as human, although in fact it was animal enough. A moment I hesitated, then, distinguishing among the sounds of conflict an unmistakable, though subdued, cry for help, I leaped forward and found myself in the midst of the melee. This was taking place in the lee of a high, dilapidated brick wall. A lamp in a sort of iron bracket spluttered dimly above on the right, but the scene of the conflict lay in densest shadow, so that the figures were indistinguishable.

"Help! By Gawd! they're strangling me-----"

From almost at my feet the cry arose and was drowned in Chinese chattering. But guided by it I now managed to make out that the struggle in progress waged between a burly English sailorman and two lithe Chinese. The yellow men seemed to have gained the advantage and my course was clear.

A straight right on the jaw of the Chinaman who was engaged in endeavouring to throttle the victim laid him prone in the dirty roadway. His companion, who was holding the wrist of the recumbent man, sprang upright as though propelled by a spring. I struck out at him savagely. He uttered a shrill scream not unlike that of a stricken hare, and fled so rapidly that he seemed to melt in the mist.

"Gawd bless you, mate!" came chokingly from the ground--and the rescued man, extricating himself from beneath the body of his stunned assailant, rose unsteadily to his feet and lurched toward me.

As I had surmised, he was a sailor, wearing a rough, blue-serge jacket and having his greasy trousers thrust into heavy seaboots--by which I judged that he was but newly come ashore. He stooped and picked up his cap. It was covered in mud, as were the rest of his garments, but he brushed it with his sleeve as though it had been but slightly soiled and clapped it on his head.

He grasped my hand in a grip of iron, peering into my face, and his breath was eloquent.

"I'd had one or two, mate," he confided huskily (the confession was unnecessary). "It was them two in the Blue Anchor as did it; if I 'adn't 'ad them last two, I could 'ave broke up them Chinks with one 'and tied behind me."



"That's all right," I said hastily, "but what are we going to do about this Chink here?" I added, endeavouring at the same time to extricate my hand from the vise-like grip in which he persistently held it. "He hit the tiles pretty heavy when he went down."

As if to settle my doubts, the recumbent figure suddenly arose and without a word fled into the darkness and was gone like a phantom. My new friend made no attempt to follow, but:

"You can't kill a bloody Chink," he confided, still clutching my hand; "it ain't 'umanly possible. It's easier to kill a cat. Come along o' me and 'ave one; then I'll tell you somethink. I'll put you on somethink, I will."

With surprising steadiness of gait, considering the liquid cargo he had aboard, the man, releasing my hand and now seizing me firmly by the arm, confidently led me by divers narrow ways, which I knew, to a little beerhouse frequented by persons of his class.

My own attire was such as to excite no suspicion in these surroundings, and although I considered that my acquaintance had imbibed more than enough for one night, I let him have his own way in order that I might learn the story which he seemed disposed to confide in me. Settled in the corner of the beerhouse--which chanced to be nearly empty--with portentous pewters before us, the conversation was opened by my new friend:

"I've been paid off from the Jupiter--Samuelson's Planet Line," he explained. "What I am is a fireman."

"She was from Singapore to London?" I asked.

"She was," he replied, "and it was at Suez it 'appened--at Suez."

I did not interrupt him.

"I was ashore at Suez--we all was, owin' to a 'itch with the canal company--a matter of money, I may say. They make yer pay before they'll take yer through. Do you know that?"

I nodded.

"Suez is a place," he continued, "where they don't sell whisky, only poison. Was you ever at Suez?"

Again I nodded, being most anxious to avoid diverting the current of my friend's thoughts.

"Well, then," he continued, "you know Greek Jimmy's--and that's where I'd been."

I did not know Greek Jimmy's, but I thought it unnecessary to mention the fact.

"It was just about this time on a steamin' 'ot night as I come out of Jimmy's and started for the ship. I was walkin' along the Waghorn Quay, same as I might be walkin' along to-night, all by myself--bit of a list to port but nothing much--full o' joy an' happiness, 'appy an' free--'appy an' free. Just like you might have noticed to-night, I noticed a knot of Chinks scrappin' on the ground all amongst the dust right in front of me. I rammed in, windmillin' all round and knocking 'em down like skittles. Seemed to me there was about ten of 'em, but allowin' for Jimmy's whisky, maybe there wasn't more than three. Anyway, they all shifted and left me standin' there in the empty street with this 'ere in my 'and."

At that, without more ado, he thrust his hand deep into some concealed pocket and jerked out a Chinese pigtail, which had been severed, apparently some three inches from the scalp, by a clean cut. My acquaintance, with somewhat bleared eyes glistening in appreciation of his own dramatic skill--for I could not conceal my surprise--dangled it before me triumphantly.

"Which of 'em it belong to," he continued, thrusting it into another pocket and drumming loudly on the counter for more beer, "I can't say, 'cos I don't know. But that ain't all."

The tankards being refilled and my friend having sampled the contents of his own:

"That ain't all," he continued. "I thought I'd keep it as a sort of relic, like. What 'appened? I'll tell you. Amongst the crew there's three Chinks--see? We ain't through the canal before one of 'em, a new one to me--Li Ping is his name--offers me five bob for the pigtail, which he sees me looking at one mornin'. I give him a punch on the nose an' 'e don't renew the offer: but that night (we're layin' at Port Said) 'e tries to pinch it! I dam' near broke his neck, and 'e don't try any more. To-night"--he extended his right arm forensically--"a deppitation of Chinks waits on me at the dock gates; they explains as from a patriotic point of view they feels it to be their dooty to buy that pigtail off of me, and they bids a quid, a bar of gold--a Jimmy o'

Goblin!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously and emptied his pewter. A sense of what was coming began to dawn on me. That the "hold-up" near the riverside formed part of the scheme was possible, and, reflecting on my rough treatment of the two Chinamen, I chuckled inwardly. Possibly, however, the scheme had germinated in my acquaintance's mind merely as a result of an otherwise common assault, of a kind not unusual in these parts, but, whether elaborate or comparatively simple, that the story of the pigtail was a "plant" designed to reach my pocket, seemed a reasonable hypothesis.

"I told him to go to China," concluded the object of my suspicion, again rapping upon the counter, "and you see what come of it. All I got to say is this: If they're so bloody patriotic, I says one thing: I ain't the man to stand in their way. You done me a good turn to-night, mate; I'm doing you one. 'Ere's the bloody pigtail, 'ere's my empty mug. Fill the mug and the pigtail's yours. It's good for a quid at the dock gates any day!"

My suspicions vanished; my interest arose to boiling point. I refilled my acquaintance's mug, pressed a sovereign upon him (in honesty I must confess that he was loath to take it), and departed with the pigtail coiled neatly in an inner pocket of my jacket. I entered the house in Wade Street by the side door, and half an hour later let myself out by the front door, having cast off my dockland disguise.

## II

### *HOW I LOST IT*

It was not until the following evening that I found leisure to examine my strange acquisition, for affairs of more immediate importance engrossed my attention. But at about ten o'clock I seated myself at my table, lighted the lamp, and taking out the pigtail from the table drawer, placed it on the blotting-pad and began to examine it with the greatest curiosity, for few Chinese affect the pigtail nowadays.

I had scarcely commenced my examination, however, when it was dramatically interrupted. The door bell commenced to ring jerkily. I stood up, and as I did so the ringing ceased and in its place came a muffled beating on the door. I hurried into the passage as the bell commenced ringing again, and I had almost reached the door when once more the ringing ceased; but now I could hear a woman's voice, low but

agitated:

"Open the door! Oh, for God's sake be quick!"

Completely mystified, and not a little alarmed, I threw open the door, and in there staggered a woman heavily veiled, so that I could see little of her features, but by the lines of her figure I judged her to be young.

Uttering a sort of moan of terror she herself closed the door, and stood with her back to it, watching me through the thick veil, while her breast rose and fell tumultuously.

"Thank God there was someone at home!" she gasped.

I think I may say with justice that I had never been so surprised in my life; every particular of the incident marked it as unique--set it apart from the episodes of everyday life.

"Madam," I began doubtfully, "you seem to be much alarmed at something, and if I can be of any assistance to you-----"

"You have saved my life!" she whispered, and pressed one hand to her bosom. "In a moment I will explain."

"Won't you rest a little after your evidently alarming experience?" I suggested.

My strange visitor nodded, without speaking, and I conducted her to the study which I had just left, and placed the most comfortable arm-chair close beside the table so that as I sat I might study this woman who so strangely had burst in upon me. I even tilted the shaded lamp, artlessly, a trick I had learned from Harley, in order that the light might fall upon her face.

She may have detected this device; I know not; but as if in answer to its challenge, she raised her gloved hands and unfastened the heavy veil which had concealed her features.

Thereupon I found myself looking into a pair of lustrous black eyes whose almond shape was that of the Orient; I found myself looking at a woman who, since she was evidently a Jewess, was probably no older than eighteen or nineteen, but whose beauty was ripely voluptuous, who might fittingly have posed for Salome, who, despite her modern fashionable garments, at once suggested to my mind the wanton beauty of the daughter of Herodias.

I stared at her silently for a time, and presently her full lips parted in a slow smile. My ideas were diverted into another channel.

"You have yet to tell me what alarmed you," I said in a low voice, but as courteously as possible, "and if I can be of any assistance in the matter."

My visitor seemed to recollect her fright--or the necessity for simulation. The pupils of her fine eyes seemed to grow larger and darker; she pressed her white teeth into her lower lips, and resting her hands upon the table leaned toward me.

"I am a stranger to London," she began, now exhibiting a certain diffidence, "and to-night I was looking for the chambers of Mr. Raphael Philips of Figtree Court."

"This is Figtree Court," I said, "but I know of no Mr. Raphael Philips who has chambers here."

The black eyes met mine despairingly.

"But I am positive of the address!" protested my beautiful but strange caller--from her left glove she drew out a scrap of paper, "here it is."

I glanced at the fragment, upon which, in a woman's hand the words were pencilled: "Mr. Raphael Philips, 36-b Figtree Court, London."

I stared at my visitor, deeply mystified.

"These chambers are 36-b!" I said. "But I am not Raphael Philips, nor have I ever heard of him. My name is Malcolm Knox. There is evidently some mistake, but"--returning the slip of paper--"pardon me if I remind you, I have yet to learn the cause of your alarm."

"I was followed across the court and up the stairs."

"Followed! By whom?"

"By a dreadful-looking man, chattering in some tongue I did not understand!"

My amazement was momentarily growing greater.

"What kind of a man?" I demanded rather abruptly.

"A yellow-faced man--remember I could only just distinguish him in the darkness on the stairway, and see little more of him than his eyes at that, and his ugly gleaming teeth--oh! it was horrible!"

"You astound me," I said; "the thing is utterly incomprehensible." I switched off the light of the lamp. "I'll see if there's any sign of him in the court below."

"Oh, don't leave me! For heaven's sake don't leave me alone!"

She clutched my arm in the darkness.

"Have no fear; I merely propose to look out from this window."

Suiting the action to the word, I peered down into the court below. It was quite deserted. The night was a very dark one, and there were many patches of shadow in which a man might have lain concealed.

"I can see no one," I said, speaking as confidently as possible, and relighting the lamp, "if I call a cab for you and see you safely into it, you will have nothing to fear, I think."

"I have a cab waiting," she replied, and lowering the veil she stood up to go.

"Kindly allow me to see you to it. I am sorry you have been subjected to this annoyance, especially as you have not attained the object of your visit."

"Thank you so much for your kindness; there must be some mistake about the address, of course."

She clung to my arm very tightly as we descended the stairs, and often glanced back over her shoulder affrightedly, as we crossed the court. There was not a sign of anyone about, however, and I could not make up my mind whether the story of the yellow man was a delusion or a fabrication. I inclined to the latter theory, but the object of such a deception was more difficult to determine.

Sure enough, a taxicab was waiting at the entrance to the court; and my visitor, having seated herself within, extended her hand to me, and even through the thick veil I could detect her brilliant smile.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Knox," she said, "and a thousand apologies. I am sincerely sorry to have given you all this trouble."

The cab drove off. For a moment I stood looking after it, in a state of dreamy incertitude, then turned and slowly retraced my steps. Reopening the door of my chambers with my key, I returned to my study and sat down at the table to endeavour to arrange the facts of what I recognized to be a really amazing episode. The adventure, trifling though it seemed, undoubtedly held some hidden significance that at present was not apparent to me. In accordance with the excellent custom of my friend, Paul Harley, I prepared to make notes of the occurrence while the facts were still fresh in my memory. At the moment that I was about to begin, I made an astounding discovery.

Although I had been absent only a few minutes, and had locked my door behind me, the pigtail was gone!

I sat quite still, listening intently. The woman's story of the yellow man on the stairs suddenly assumed a totally different aspect--a new and sinister aspect. Could it be that the pigtail was at the bottom of the mystery?--could it be that some murderous Chinaman who had been lurking in hiding, waiting his opportunity, had in some way gained access to my chambers during that brief absence? If so, was he gone?

From the table drawer I took out a revolver, ascertained that it was fully loaded, and turning up light after light as I proceeded, conducted a room-to-room search. It was without result; there was absolutely nothing to indicate that anyone had surreptitiously entered or departed from my chambers.

I returned to the study and sat gazing at the revolver lying on the blotting-pad before me. Perhaps my mind worked slowly, but I think that fully fifteen minutes must have passed before it dawned on me that the explanation not only of the missing pigtail but of the other incidents of the night, was simple enough. The yellow man had been a fabrication, and my dark-eyed visitor had not been in quest of "Raphael Philips," but in quest of the pigtail: and her quest had been successful!

"What a hopeless fool I am!" I cried, and banged my fist down upon the table, "there was no yellow man at all--there was-----"

My door bell rang. I sprang nervously to my feet, glanced at the revolver on the table--and finally dropped it into my coat pocket ere going out and opening the door.

On the landing stood a police constable and an officer in plain clothes.

"Your name is Malcolm Knox?" asked the constable, glancing at a note-book which he held in his hand.

"It is," I replied.

"You are required to come at once to Bow Street to identify a woman who was found murdered in a taxi-cab in the Strand about eleven o'clock to-night."

I suppressed an exclamation of horror; I felt myself turning pale.

"But what has it to do-----"

"The driver stated she came from your chambers, for you saw her off, and her last words to you were 'Good night, Mr. Knox, I am sincerely sorry to have given you all this trouble.' Is that correct, sir?"

The constable, who had read out the information in an official voice, now looked at me, as I stood there stupefied.

"It is," I said blankly. "I'll come at once." It would seem that I had misjudged my unfortunate visitor: her story of the yellow man on the stair had apparently been not a fabrication, but a gruesome fact!

### III

#### *HOW I REGAINED IT*

My ghastly duty was performed; I had identified the dreadful thing, which less than an hour before had been a strikingly beautiful woman, as my mysterious visitor. The police were palpably disappointed at the sparsity of my knowledge respecting her. In fact, had it not chanced that Detective Sergeant Durham was in the station, I think they would have doubted the accuracy of my story.

As a man of some experience in such matters, I fully recognized its improbability, but beyond relating the circumstances leading up to my possession of the pigtail and the events which had ensued, I could do no more in the matter. The weird relic had not been found on the dead woman, nor in the cab.

Now the unsavoury business was finished, and I walked along Bow Street, racking my mind for the master-key to this mystery in which I was become enmeshed. How I longed to rush off to Harley's rooms in Chancery Lane and to tell him the whole story! But my friend was a thousand miles away--and I had to see the thing out alone.



That the pigtail was some sacred relic stolen from a Chinese temple and sought for by its fanatical custodians was a theory which persistently intruded itself. But I could find no place in that hypothesis for the beautiful Jewess; and that she was intimately concerned I did not doubt. A cool survey of the facts rendered it fairly evident that it was she and none other who had stolen the pigtail from my rooms. Some third party--possibly the "yellow man" of whom she had spoken--had in turn stolen it from her, strangling her in the process.

The police theory of the murder (and I was prepared to accept it) was that the assassin had been crouching in hiding behind or beside the cab--or even within the dark interior. He had leaped in and attacked the woman at the moment that the taxi-man had started his engine; if already inside, the deed had proven even easier. Then, during some block in the traffic, he had slipped out unseen, leaving the body of the victim to be discovered when the cab pulled up at the hotel.

I knew of only one place in London where I might hope to obtain useful information, and for that place I was making now. It was Malay Jack's, whence I had been bound on the previous night when my strange meeting with the seaman who then possessed the pigtail had led to a change of plan. The scum of the Asiatic population always come at one time or another to Jack's, and I hoped by dint of a little patience to achieve what the police had now apparently despaired of achieving--the discovery of the assassin.

Having called at my chambers to obtain my revolver, I mounted an eastward-bound motor-bus. The night, as I have already stated, was exceptionally dark. There was no moon, and heavy clouds were spread over the sky; so that the deserted East End streets presented a sufficiently uninviting aspect, but one with which I was by no means unfamiliar and which certainly in no way daunted me.

Changing at Paul Harley's Chinatown base in Wade Street, I turned my steps in the same direction as upon the preceding night; but if my own will played no part in the matter, then decidedly Providence truly guided me. Poetic justice is rare enough in real life, yet I was destined to-night to witness swift retribution overtaking a malefactor.

The by-ways which I had trodden were utterly deserted; I was far from the lighted high road, and the only signs of human activity that reached me came from the adjacent river; therefore, when presently an outcry arose from somewhere on my left, for a moment I really believed that my imagination was vividly reproducing the episode of the night before!

A furious scuffle--between a European and an Asiatic--was in progress not twenty yards away!

Realizing that such was indeed the case, and that I was not the victim of hallucination, I advanced slowly in the direction of the sounds, but my footsteps reechoed hollowly from wall to wall of the narrow passage-way, and my coming brought the conflict to a sudden and dramatic termination.

"Thought I wouldn't know yer ugly face, did yer?" yelled a familiar voice. "No good squealin'--I got yer! I'd bust you up if I could!" (a sound of furious blows and inarticulate chattering) "but it ain't 'umanly possible to kill a Chink-----"

I hurried forward toward the spot where two dim figures were locked in deadly conflict.

"Take that to remember me by!" gasped the husky voice as I ran up.

One of the figures collapsed in a heap upon the ground. The other made off at a lumbering gait along a second and even narrower passage branching at right angles from that in which the scuffle had taken place.

The clatter of the heavy sea-boots died away in the distance. I stood beside the fallen man, looking keenly about to right and left; for an impression was strong upon me that another than I had been witness of the scene--that a shadowy form had slunk back furtively at my approach. But the night gave up no sound in confirmation of this, and I could detect no sign of any lurker.

I stooped over the Chinaman (for a Chinaman it was) who lay at my feet, and directed the ray of my pocket-lamp upon his yellow and contorted countenance. I suppressed a cry of surprise and horror.

Despite the human impossibility referred to by the missing fireman, this particular Chinaman had joined the shades of his ancestors. I think that final blow, which had felled him, had brought his shaven skull in such violent contact with the wall that he had died of the thundering concussion set up.

Kneeling there and looking into his upturned eyes, I became aware that my position was not an enviable one, particularly since I felt little disposed to set the law on the track of the real culprit. For this man who now lay dead at my feet was doubtless one of the pair who had attempted the life of the fireman of the Jupiter.

That my seafaring acquaintance had designed to kill the Chinaman I did not believe, despite his stormy words: the death had been an accident, and (perhaps my morality was over-broad) I considered the assault to have been justified.

Now my ideas led me further yet. The dead Chinaman wore a rough blue coat, and gingerly, for I found the contact repulsive, I inserted my hand into the inside pocket. Immediately my fingers closed upon a familiar object--and I stood up, whistling slightly, and dangling in my left hand the missing pigtail!

Beyond doubt Justice had guided the seaman's blows. This was the man who had murdered my dark-eyed visitor!

I stood perfectly still, directing the little white ray of my flashlight upon the pigtail in my hand. I realized that my position, difficult before, now was become impossible; the possession of the pigtail compromised me hopelessly. What should I do?

"My God!" I said aloud, "what does it all mean?"

"It means," said a gruff voice, "that it was lucky I was following you and saw what happened!"

I whirled about, my heart leaping wildly. Detective-Sergeant Durham was standing watching me, a grim smile upon his face!

I laughed rather shakily.

"Lucky indeed!" I said. "Thank God you're here. This pigtail is a nightmare which threatens to drive me mad!"

The detective advanced and knelt beside the crumpled-up figure on the ground. He examined it briefly, and then stood up.

"The fact that he had the missing pigtail in his pocket," he said, "is proof enough to my mind that he did the murder."

"And to mine."

"There's another point," he added, "which throws a lot of light on the matter. You and Mr. Harley were out of town at the time of the Huang Chow case; but the Chief and I outlined it, you remember, one night in Mr. Harley's rooms?"

"I remember it perfectly; the giant spider in the coffin-----"

"Yes; and a certain Ah Fu, confidential servant of the old man, who used to buy the birds the thing fed on. Well, Mr. Knox, Huang Chow was the biggest dealer in illicit stuff in all the East End--and this battered thing at our feet is--Ah Fu!"

"Huang Chow's servant?"

"Exactly!"

I stared, uncomprehendingly, and:

"In what way does this throw light on the matter?" I asked.

Durham--a very intelligent young officer--smiled significantly.

"I begin to see light!" he declared. "The gentleman who made off just as I arrived on the scene probably had a private quarrel with the Chinaman and was otherwise not concerned in any way."

"I am disposed to agree with you," I said guardedly.

"Of course, you've no idea of his identity?"

"I'm afraid not."

"We may find him," mused the officer, glancing at me shrewdly, "by applying at the offices of the Planet Line, but I rather doubt it. Also I rather doubt if we'll look very far. He's saved us a lot of trouble, but"--peering about in the shadowy corners which abounded--"didn't I see somebody else lurking around here?"

"I'm almost certain there was someone else!" I cried. "In fact, I could all but swear to it."

"H'm!" said the detective. "He's not here now. Might I trouble you to walk along to Limehouse Police Station for the ambulance? I'd better stay here."

I agreed at once, and started off.

Thus a second time my plans were interrupted, for my expedition that night ultimately led me to Bow Street, whence, after certain formalities had been observed, I departed for my chambers, the mysterious pigtail in my pocket. Failing the presence of Durham, the pigtail must have been

retained as evidence, but:

"We shall know where to find it if it's wanted, Mr. Knox," said the Yard man, "and I can trust you to look after your own property."

The clock of St. Paul's was chiming the hour of two when I locked the door of my chambers and prepared to turn in. The clangour of the final strokes yet vibrated through the night's silence when someone set my own door bell loudly ringing.

With an exclamation of annoyance I shot back the bolts and threw open the door.

A Chinaman stood outside upon the mat!

#### IV

#### *HOW IT ALL ENDED*

"Me wishee see you," said the apparition, smiling blandly; "me comee in?"

"Come in, by all means," I said without enthusiasm, and, switching on the light in my study, I admitted the Chinaman and stood facing him with an expression upon my face which I doubt not was the reverse of agreeable.

My visitor, who wore a slop-shop suit, also wore a wide-brimmed bowler hat; now, the set bland smile still upon his yellow face, he removed the bowler and pointed significantly to his skull.

His pigtail had been severed some three inches from the root!

"You gotchee my pigtail," he explained; "me callee get it--thank you."

"Thank you," I said grimly. "But I must ask you to establish your claim rather more firmly."

"Yessir," agreed the Chinaman.

And thereupon in tolerable pidgin English he unfolded his tale. He proclaimed his name to be Hi Wing Ho, and his profession that of a sailor, or so I understood him. While ashore at Suez he had become embroiled with some drunken seamen: knives had been drawn, and in the

scuffle by some strange accident his pigtail had been severed. He had escaped from the conflict, badly frightened, and had run a great distance before he realized his loss. Since Southern Chinamen of his particular Tong hold their pigtails in the highest regard, he had instituted inquiries as soon as possible, and had presently learned from a Chinese member of the crew of the S.S. Jupiter that the precious queue had fallen into the hands of a fireman on that vessel. He (Hi Wing Ho) had shipped on the first available steamer bound for England, having in the meanwhile communicated with his friend on the Jupiter respecting the recovery of the pigtail.

"What was the name of your friend on the Jupiter?"

"Him Li Ping--yessir!"--without the least hesitation or hurry.

I nodded. "Go on," I said.

He arrived at the London docks very shortly after the Jupiter. Indeed, the crew of the latter vessel had not yet been paid off when Hi Wing Ho presented himself at the dock gates. He admitted that, finding the fireman so obdurate, he and his friend Li Ping had resorted to violence, but he did not seem to recognize me as the person who had frustrated their designs. Thus far I found his story credible enough, excepting the accidental severing of the pigtail at Suez, but now it became wildly improbable, for he would have me believe that Li Ping, or Ah Fu, obtaining possession of the pigtail (in what manner Hi Wing Ho protested that he knew not) he sought to hold it to ransom, knowing how highly Hi Wing Ho valued it.

I glared sternly at the Chinaman, but his impassive countenance served him well. That he was lying to me I no longer doubted; for Ah Fu could not have hoped to secure such a price as would justify his committing murder; furthermore, the presence of the unfortunate Jewess in the case was not accounted for by the ingenious narrative of Hi Wing Ho. I was standing staring at him and wondering what course to adopt, when yet again my restless door-bell clamoured in the silence.

Hi Wing Ho started nervously, exhibiting the first symptoms of alarm which I had perceived in him. My mind was made up in an instant. I took my revolver from the drawer and covered him.

"Be good enough to open the door, Hi Wing Ho," I said coldly.

He shrank from me, pouring forth voluble protestations.

"Open the door!"

I clenched my left fist and advanced upon him. He scuttled away with his odd Chinese gait and threw open the door. Standing before me I saw my friend Detective Sergeant Durham, and with him a remarkably tall and very large-boned man whose square-jawed face was deeply tanned and whose aspect was dourly Scottish.

When the piercing eyes of this stranger rested upon Hi Wing Ho an expression which I shall never forget entered into them; an expression coldly murderous. As for the Chinaman, he literally crumpled up.

"You rat!" roared the stranger.

Taking one long stride he stooped upon the Chinaman, seized him by the back of the neck as a terrier might seize a rat, and lifted him to his feet.

"The mystery of the pigtail, Mr. Knox," said the detective, "is solved at last."

"Have ye got it?" demanded the Scotsman, turning to me, but without releasing his hold upon the neck of Hi Wing Ho.

I took the pigtail from my pocket and dangled it before his eyes.

"Suppose you come into my study," I said, "and explain matters."

We entered the room which had been the scene of so many singular happenings. The detective and I seated ourselves, but the Scotsman, holding the Chinaman by the neck as though he had been some inanimate bundle, stood just within the doorway, one of the most gigantic specimens of manhood I had ever set eyes upon.

"You do the talking, sir," he directed the detective; "ye have all the facts."

While Durham talked, then, we all listened--excepting the Chinaman, who was past taking an intelligent interest in anything, and who, to judge from his starting eyes, was being slowly strangled.

"The gentleman," said Durham--"Mr. Nicholson--arrived two days ago from the East. He is a buyer for a big firm of diamond merchants, and some weeks ago a valuable diamond was stolen from him-----"

"By this!" interrupted the Scotsman, shaking the wretched Hi Wing Ho terrier fashion.

"By Hi Wing Ho," explained the detective, "whom you see before you. The theft was a very ingenious one, and the man succeeded in getting away with his haul. He tried to dispose of the diamond to a certain Isaac Cohenberg, a Singapore moneylender; but Isaac Cohenberg was the bigger crook of the two. Hi Wing Ho only escaped from the establishment of Cohenberg by dint of sandbagging the moneylender, and quitted the town by a boat which left the same night. On the voyage he was indiscreet enough to take the diamond from its hiding-place and surreptitiously to examine it. Another member of the Chinese crew, one Li Ping--otherwise Ah Fu, the accredited agent of old Huang Chow!--was secretly watching our friend, and, knowing that he possessed this valuable jewel, he also learned where he kept it hidden. At Suez Ah Fu attacked Hi Wing Ho and secured possession of the diamond. It was to secure possession of the diamond that Ah Fu had gone out East. I don't doubt it. He employed Hi Wing Ho--and Hi Wing Ho tried to double on him!

"We are indebted to you, Mr. Knox, for some of the data upon which we have reconstructed the foregoing and also for the next link in the narrative. A fireman ashore from the Jupiter intruded upon the scene at Suez and deprived Ah Fu of the fruits of his labours. Hi Wing Ho seems to have been badly damaged in the scuffle, but Ah Fu, the more wily of the two, evidently followed the fireman, and, deserting from his own ship, signed on with the Jupiter."

While this story was enlightening in some respects, it was mystifying in others. I did not interrupt, however, for Durham immediately resumed:

"The drama was complicated by the presence of a fourth character--the daughter of Cohenberg. Realizing that a small fortune had slipped through his fingers, the old moneylender dispatched his daughter in pursuit of Hi Wing Ho, having learned upon which vessel the latter had sailed. He had no difficulty in obtaining this information, for he is in touch with all the crooks of the town. Had he known that the diamond had been stolen by an agent of Huang Chow, he would no doubt have hesitated. Huang Chow has an international reputation.

"However, his daughter--a girl of great personal beauty--relied upon her diplomatic gifts to regain possession of the stone, but, poor creature, she had not counted with Ah Fu, who was evidently watching your chambers (while Hi Wing Ho, it seems, was assiduously shadowing Ah Fu!). How she traced the diamond from point to point of its travels we do not know, and probably never shall know, but she was undeniably clever and unscrupulous. Poor girl! She came to a dreadful end. Mr. Nicholson, here, identified her at Bow Street to-night."



Now the whole amazing truth burst upon me.

"I understand!" I cried. "This"--and I snatched up the pigtail--

"That my pigtail," moaned Hi Wing Ho feebly.

Mr. Nicholson pitched him unceremoniously into a corner of the room, and taking the pigtail in his huge hand, clumsily unfastened it. Out from the thick part, some two inches below the point at which it had been cut from the Chinaman's head, a great diamond dropped upon the floor!

For perhaps twenty seconds there was perfect silence in my study. No one stooped to pick the diamond from the floor--the diamond which now had blood upon it. No one, so far as my sense informed me, stirred. But when, following those moments of stupefaction, we all looked up--Hi Wing Ho, like a phantom, had faded from the room!

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I

The Palace Hotel at Fort Romper was painted a light blue, a shade that is on the legs of a kind of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background. The Palace Hotel, then, was always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a gray swampish hush. It stood alone on the prairie, and when the snow was falling the town two hundred yards away was not visible. But when the traveller alighted at the railway station he was obliged to pass the Palace Hotel before he could come upon the company of low clapboard houses which composed Fort Romper, and it was not to be thought that any traveller could pass the Palace Hotel without looking at it. Pat Scully, the proprietor, had proved himself a master of strategy when he chose his paints. It is true that on clear days, when the great trans-continental expresses, long lines of swaying Pullmans, swept through Fort Romper, passengers were overcome at the sight, and the cult that knows the brown-reds and the subdivisions of the dark greens of the East expressed shame, pity, horror, in a laugh. But to the citizens of this prairie town and to the people who would naturally stop there, Pat Scully had performed a feat. With this opulence and splendor, these creeds, classes, egotisms, that streamed through Romper on the rails day after day, they had no color in common.

As if the displayed delights of such a blue hotel were not sufficiently enticing, it was Scully's habit to go every morning and evening to meet the leisurely trains that stopped at Romper and work his seductions upon any man that he might see wavering, gripsack in hand.

One morning, when a snow-cruised engine dragged its long string of freight cars and its one passenger coach to the station, Scully performed the marvel of catching three men. One was a shaky and quick-eyed Swede, with a great shining cheap valise; one was a tall bronzed cowboy, who was on his way to a ranch near the Dakota line; one was a little silent man from the East, who didn't look it, and didn't announce it. Scully practically made them prisoners. He was so nimble and merry and kindly that each probably felt it would be the height of brutality to try to escape. They trudged off over the creaking board sidewalks in the wake of the eager little Irishman. He wore a heavy fur cap squeezed tightly down on his head. It caused his two red ears to stick out stiffly, as if they were made of tin.

At last, Scully, elaborately, with boisterous hospitality, conducted them through the portals of the blue hotel. The room which they entered was small. It seemed to be merely a proper temple for an enormous stove, which, in the centre, was humming with godlike violence. At various points on its surface the iron had become luminous and glowed yellow from the heat. Beside the stove Scully's son Johnnie was playing High-Five with an old farmer who had whiskers both gray and sandy. They were quarrelling. Frequently the old farmer turned his face towards a box of sawdust--colored brown from tobacco juice--that was behind the stove, and spat with an air of great impatience and irritation. With a loud flourish of words Scully destroyed the game of cards, and hustled his son up-stairs with part of the baggage of the new guests. He himself conducted them to three basins of the coldest water in the world. The cowboy and the Easterner burnished themselves fiery-red with this water, until it seemed to be some kind of a metal polish. The Swede, however, merely dipped his fingers gingerly and with trepidation. It was notable that throughout this series of small ceremonies the three travellers were made to feel that Scully was very benevolent. He was conferring great favors upon them. He handed the towel from one to the other with an air of philanthropic impulse.

Afterwards they went to the first room, and, sitting about the stove, listened to Scully's officious clamor at his daughters, who were preparing the mid-day meal. They reflected in the silence of experienced men who tread carefully amid new people. Nevertheless, the old farmer, stationary, invincible in his chair near the warmest part of the stove, turned his face from the sawdust box frequently and addressed a glowing commonplace to the strangers. Usually he was answered in short but adequate sentences by either the cowboy or the Easterner. The Swede said nothing. He seemed to be occupied in making furtive estimates of each man in the room. One might have thought that he had the sense of silly suspicion which comes to guilt. He resembled a badly frightened man.

Later, at dinner, he spoke a little, addressing his conversation entirely to Scully. He volunteered that he had come from New York, where for ten years he had worked as a tailor. These facts seemed to strike Scully as fascinating, and afterwards he volunteered that he had lived at Romper for fourteen years. The Swede asked about the crops and the price of labor. He seemed barely to listen to Scully's extended replies. His eyes continued to rove from man to man.

Finally, with a laugh and a wink, he said that some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after his statement he

straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again, loudly. It was plain that the demonstration had no meaning to the others. They looked at him wondering and in silence.

## II

As the men trooped heavily back into the front-room, the two little windows presented views of a turmoiling sea of snow. The huge arms of the wind were making attempts--mighty, circular, futile--to embrace the flakes as they sped. A gate-post like a still man with a blanched face stood aghast amid this profligate fury. In a hearty voice Scully announced the presence of a blizzard. The guests of the blue hotel, lighting their pipes, assented with grunts of lazy masculine contentment. No island of the sea could be exempt in the degree of this little room with its humming stove. Johnnie, son of Scully, in a tone which defined his opinion of his ability as a card-player, challenged the old farmer of both gray and sandy whiskers to a game of High-Five. The farmer agreed with a contemptuous and bitter scoff. They sat close to the stove, and squared their knees under a wide board. The cowboy and the Easterner watched the game with interest. The Swede remained near the window, aloof, but with a countenance that showed signs of an inexplicable excitement.

The play of Johnnie and the gray-beard was suddenly ended by another quarrel. The old man arose while casting a look of heated scorn at his adversary. He slowly buttoned his coat, and then stalked with fabulous dignity from the room. In the discreet silence of all other men the Swede laughed. His laughter rang somehow childish. Men by this time had begun to look at him askance, as if they wished to inquire what ailed him.

A new game was formed jocosely. The cowboy volunteered to become the partner of Johnnie, and they all then turned to ask the Swede to throw in his lot with the little Easterner. He asked some questions about the game, and, learning that it wore many names, and that he had played it when it was under an alias, he accepted the invitation. He strode towards the men nervously, as if he expected to be assaulted. Finally, seated, he gazed from face to face and laughed shrilly. This laugh was so strange that the Easterner looked up quickly, the cowboy sat intent and with his mouth open, and Johnnie paused, holding the cards with still fingers.

Afterwards there was a short silence. Then Johnnie said, "Well, let's get at it. Come on now!" They pulled their chairs forward until their

knees were bunched under the board. They began to play, and their interest in the game caused the others to forget the manner of the Swede.

The cowboy was a board-whacker. Each time that he held superior cards he whanged them, one by one, with exceeding force, down upon the improvised table, and took the tricks with a glowing air of prowess and pride that sent thrills of indignation into the hearts of his opponents. A game with a board-whacker in it is sure to become intense. The countenances of the Easterner and the Swede were miserable whenever the cowboy thundered down his aces and kings, while Johnnie, his eyes gleaming with joy, chuckled and chuckled.

Because of the absorbing play none considered the strange ways of the Swede. They paid strict heed to the game. Finally, during a lull caused by a new deal, the Swede suddenly addressed Johnnie: "I suppose there have been a good many men killed in this room." The jaws of the others dropped and they looked at him.

"What in hell are you talking about?" said Johnnie.

The Swede laughed again his blatant laugh, full of a kind of false courage and defiance. "Oh, you know what I mean all right," he answered.

"I'm a liar if I do!" Johnnie protested. The card was halted, and the men stared at the Swede. Johnnie evidently felt that as the son of the proprietor he should make a direct inquiry. "Now, what might you be drivin' at, mister?" he asked. The Swede winked at him. It was a wink full of cunning. His fingers shook on the edge of the board. "Oh, maybe you think I have been to nowheres. Maybe you think I'm a tenderfoot?"

"I don't know nothin' about you," answered Johnnie, "and I don't give a damn where you've been. All I got to say is that I don't know what you're driving at. There hain't never been nobody killed in this room."

The cowboy, who had been steadily gazing at the Swede, then spoke: "What's wrong with you, mister?"

Apparently it seemed to the Swede that he was formidably menaced. He shivered and turned white near the corners of his mouth. He sent an appealing glance in the direction of the little Easterner. During these moments he did not forget to wear his air of advanced pot-valor. "They say they don't know what I mean," he remarked mockingly to the

Easterner.

The latter answered after prolonged and cautious reflection. "I don't understand you," he said, impassively.

The Swede made a movement then which announced that he thought he had encountered treachery from the only quarter where he had expected sympathy, if not help. "Oh, I see you are all against me. I see--"

The cowboy was in a state of deep stupefaction. "Say," he cried, as he tumbled the deck violently down upon the board "--say, what are you gittin' at, hey?"

The Swede sprang up with the celerity of a man escaping from a snake on the floor. "I don't want to fight!" he shouted. "I don't want to fight!"

The cowboy stretched his long legs indolently and deliberately. His hands were in his pockets. He spat into the sawdust box. "Well, who the hell thought you did?" he inquired.

The Swede backed rapidly towards a corner of the room. His hands were out protectingly in front of his chest, but he was making an obvious struggle to control his fright. "Gentlemen," he quavered, "I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house! I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house!" In his eyes was the dying-swan look. Through the windows could be seen the snow turning blue in the shadow of dusk. The wind tore at the house and some loose thing beat regularly against the clap-boards like a spirit tapping.

A door opened, and Scully himself entered. He paused in surprise as he noted the tragic attitude of the Swede. Then he said, "What's the matter here?"

The Swede answered him swiftly and eagerly: "These men are going to kill me."

"Kill you!" ejaculated Scully. "Kill you! What are you talkin'?"

The Swede made the gesture of a martyr.

Scully wheeled sternly upon his son. "What is this, Johnnie?"

The lad had grown sullen. "Damned if I know," he answered. "I can't make no sense to it." He began to shuffle the cards, fluttering them together with an angry snap. "He says a good many men have been killed

in this room, or something like that. And he says he's goin' to be killed here too. I don't know what ails him. He's crazy, I shouldn't wonder."

Scully then looked for explanation to the cowboy, but the cowboy simply shrugged his shoulders.

"Kill you?" said Scully again to the Swede. "Kill you? Man, you're off your nut."

"Oh, I know," burst out the Swede. "I know what will happen. Yes, I'm crazy--yes. Yes, of course, I'm crazy--yes. But I know one thing--" There was a sort of sweat of misery and terror upon his face. "I know I won't get out of here alive."

The cowboy drew a deep breath, as if his mind was passing into the last stages of dissolution. "Well, I'm dog-goned," he whispered to himself.

Scully wheeled suddenly and faced his son. "You've been troublin' this man!"

Johnnie's voice was loud with its burden of grievance. "Why, good Gawd, I ain't done nothin' to 'im."

The Swede broke in. "Gentlemen, do not disturb yourselves. I will leave this house. I will go away because"--he accused them dramatically with his glance--"because I do not want to be killed."

Scully was furious with his son. "Will you tell me what is the matter, you young divil? What's the matter, anyhow? Speak out!"

"Blame it!" cried Johnnie in despair, "don't I tell you I don't know. He--he says we want to kill him, and that's all I know. I can't tell what ails him."

The Swede continued to repeat: "Never mind, Mr. Scully; nevermind. I will leave this house. I will go away, because I do not wish to be killed. Yes, of course, I am crazy--yes. But I know one thing! I will go away. I will leave this house. Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away."

"You will not go 'way," said Scully. "You will not go 'way until I hear the reason of this business. If anybody has troubled you I will take care of him. This is my house. You are under my roof, and I will not allow any peaceable man to be troubled here." He cast a terrible

eye upon Johnnie, the cowboy, and the Easterner.

"Never mind, Mr. Scully; never mind. I will go away. I do not wish to be killed." The Swede moved towards the door, which opened upon the stairs. It was evidently his intention to go at once for his baggage.

"No, no," shouted Scully peremptorily; but the white-faced man slid by him and disappeared. "Now," said Scully severely, "what does this mane?"

Johnnie and the cowboy cried together: "Why, we didn't do nothin' to 'im!"

Scully's eyes were cold. "No," he said, "you didn't?"

Johnnie swore a deep oath. "Why this is the wildest loon I ever see. We didn't do nothin' at all. We were jest sittin' here play in' cards, and he--"

The father suddenly spoke to the Easterner. "Mr. Blanc," he asked, "what has these boys been doin'?"

The Easterner reflected again. "I didn't see anything wrong at all," he said at last, slowly.

Scully began to howl. "But what does it mane?" He stared ferociously at his son. "I have a mind to lather you for this, me boy."

Johnnie was frantic. "Well, what have I done?" he bawled at his father.

### III

"I think you are tongue-tied," said Scully finally to his son, the cowboy, and the Easterner; and at the end of this scornful sentence he left the room.

Up-stairs the Swede was swiftly fastening the straps of his great valise. Once his back happened to be half turned towards the door, and, hearing a noise there, he wheeled and sprang up, uttering a loud cry. Scully's wrinkled visage showed grimly in the light of the small lamp he carried. This yellow effulgence, streaming upward, colored only his prominent features, and left his eyes, for instance, in mysterious shadow. He resembled a murderer.



"Man! man!" he exclaimed, "have you gone daffy?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" rejoined the other. "There are people in this world who know pretty nearly as much as you do--understand?"

For a moment they stood gazing at each other. Upon the Swede's deathly pale cheeks were two spots brightly crimson and sharply edged, as if they had been carefully painted. Scully placed the light on the table and sat himself on the edge of the bed. He spoke ruminatively. "By cracky, I never heard of such a thing in my life. It's a complete muddle. I can't, for the soul of me, think how you ever got this idea into your head." Presently he lifted his eyes and asked: "And did you sure think they were going to kill you?"

The Swede scanned the old man as if he wished to see into his mind. "I did," he said at last. He obviously suspected that this answer might precipitate an outbreak. As he pulled on a strap his whole arm shook, the elbow wavering like a bit of paper.

Scully banged his hand impressively on the foot-board of the bed. "Why, man, we're goin' to have a line of ilictric street-cars in this town next spring."

"A line of electric street-cars," repeated the Swede, stupidly.

"And," said Scully, "there's a new railroad goin' to be built down from Broken Arm to here. Not to mintion the four churches and the smashin' big brick school-house. Then there's the big factory, too. Why, in two years Romper 'll be a \_metropolis\_."

Having finished the preparation of his baggage, the Swede straightened himself. "Mr. Scully," he said, with sudden hardihood, "how much do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me anythin'," said the old man, angrily.

"Yes, I do," retorted the Swede. He took seventy-five cents from his pocket and tendered it to Scully; but the latter snapped his fingers in disdainful refusal. However, it happened that they both stood gazing in a strange fashion at three silver pieces on the Swede's open palm.

"I'll not take your money," said Scully at last. "Not after what's been goin' on here." Then a plan seemed to strike him. "Here," he cried, picking up his lamp and moving towards the door. "Here! Come

with me a minute."

"No," said the Swede, in overwhelming alarm.

"Yes," urged the old man. "Come on! I want you to come and see a picter--just across the hall--in my room."

The Swede must have concluded that his hour was come. His jaw dropped and his teeth showed like a dead man's. He ultimately followed Scully across the corridor, but he had the step of one hung in chains.

Scully flashed the light high on the wall of his own chamber. There was revealed a ridiculous photograph of a little girl. She was leaning against a balustrade of gorgeous decoration, and the formidable bang to her hair was prominent. The figure was as graceful as an upright sled-stake, and, withal, it was of the hue of lead. "There," said Scully, tenderly, "that's the picter of my little girl that died. Her name was Carrie. She had the purtiest hair you ever saw! I was that fond of her, she--"

Turning then, he saw that the Swede was not contemplating the picture at all, but, instead, was keeping keen watch on the gloom in the rear.

"Look, man!" cried Scully, heartily. "That's the picter of my little gal that died. Her name was Carrie. And then here's the picter of my oldest boy, Michael. He's a lawyer in Lincoln, an' doin' well. I gave that boy a grand eddycation, and I'm glad for it now. He's a fine boy. Look at 'im now. Ain't he bold as blazes, him there in Lincoln, an honored an' respected gntleman. An honored an' respected gntleman," concluded Scully with a flourish. And, so saying, he smote the Swede jovially on the back.

The Swede faintly smiled.

"Now," said the old man, "there's only one more thing." He dropped suddenly to the floor and thrust his head beneath the bed. The Swede could hear his muffled voice. "I'd keep it under me piller if it wasn't for that boy Johnnie. Then there's the old woman--Where is it now? I never put it twice in the same place. Ah, now come out with you!"

Presently he backed clumsily from under the bed, dragging with him an old coat rolled into a bundle. "I've fetched him," he muttered. Kneeling on the floor, he unrolled the coat and extracted from its heart a large yellow-brown whiskey bottle.

His first maneuver was to hold the bottle up to the light. Reassured, apparently, that nobody had been tampering with it, he thrust it with a generous movement towards the Swede.

The weak-kneed Swede was about to eagerly clutch this element of strength, but he suddenly jerked his hand away and cast a look of horror upon Scully.

"Drink," said the old man affectionately. He had risen to his feet, and now stood facing the Swede.

There was a silence. Then again Scully said: "Drink!"

The Swede laughed wildly. He grabbed the bottle, put it to his mouth, and as his lips curled absurdly around the opening and his throat worked, he kept his glance, burning with hatred, upon the old man's face.

#### IV

After the departure of Scully the three men, with the card-board still upon their knees, preserved for a long time an astounded silence. Then Johnnie said: "That's the dod-dangest Swede I ever see."

"He ain't no Swede," said the cowboy, scornfully.

"Well, what is he then?" cried Johnnie. "What is he then?"

"It's my opinion," replied the cowboy deliberately, "he's some kind of a Dutchman." It was a venerable custom of the country to entitle as Swedes all light-haired men who spoke with a heavy tongue. In consequence the idea of the cowboy was not without its daring. "Yes, sir," he repeated. "It's my opinion this feller is some kind of a Dutchman."

"Well, he says he's a Swede, anyhow," muttered Johnnie, sulkily. He turned to the Easterner: "What do you think, Mr. Blanc?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied the Easterner.

"Well, what do you think makes him act that way?" asked the cowboy.

"Why, he's frightened." The Easterner knocked his pipe against a rim

of the stove. "He's clear frightened out of his boots."

"What at?" cried Johnnie and cowboy together.

The Easterner reflected over his answer.

"What at?" cried the others again.

"Oh, I don't know, but it seems to me this man has been reading dime-novels, and he thinks he's right out in the middle of it--the shootin' and stabbin' and all."

"But," said the cowboy, deeply scandalized, "this ain't Wyoming, ner none of them places. This is Nebrasker."

"Yes," added Johnnie, "an' why don't he wait till he gits \_out West? \_"

The travelled Easterner laughed. "It isn't different there even--not in these days. But he thinks he's right in the middle of hell."

Johnnie and the cowboy mused long.

"It's awful funny," remarked Johnnie at last.

"Yes," said the cowboy. "This is a queer game. I hope we don't git snowed in, because then we'd have to stand this here man bein' around with us all the time. That wouldn't be no good."

"I wish pop would throw him out," said Johnnie.

Presently they heard a loud stamping on the stairs, accompanied by ringing jokes in the voice of old Scully, and laughter, evidently from the Swede. The men around the stove stared vacantly at each other. "Gosh!" said the cowboy. The door flew open, and old Scully, flushed and anecdotal, came into the room. He was jabbering at the Swede, who followed him, laughing bravely. It was the entry of two roisterers from a banquet-hall.

"Come now," said Scully sharply to the three seated men, "move up and give us a chance at the stove." The cowboy and the Easterner obediently sidled their chairs to make room for the new-comers. Johnnie, however, simply arranged himself in a more indolent attitude, and then remained motionless.

"Come! Git over, there," said Scully.

"Plenty of room on the other side of the stove," said Johnnie.

"Do you think we want to sit in the draught?" roared the father.

But the Swede here interposed with a grandeur of confidence. "No, no. Let the boy sit where he likes," he cried in a bullying voice to the father.

"All right! All right!" said Scully, deferentially. The cowboy and the Easterner exchanged glances of wonder.

The five chairs were formed in a crescent about one side of the stove. The Swede began to talk; he talked arrogantly, profanely, angrily. Johnnie, the cowboy, and the Easterner maintained a morose silence, while old Scully appeared to be receptive and eager, breaking in constantly with sympathetic ejaculations.

Finally the Swede announced that he was thirsty. He moved in his chair, and said that he would go for a drink of water.

"I'll git it for you," cried Scully at once.

"No," said the Swede, contemptuously. "I'll get it for myself." He arose and stalked with the air of an owner off into the executive parts of the hotel.

As soon as the Swede was out of hearing Scully sprang to his feet and whispered intensely to the others: "Up-stairs he thought I was tryin' to poison 'im."

"Say," said Johnnie, "this makes me sick. Why don't you throw 'im out in the snow?"

"Why, he's all right now," declared Scully. "It was only that he was from the East, and he thought this was a tough place. That's all. He's all right now."

The cowboy looked with admiration upon the Easterner. "You were straight," he said. "You were on to that there Dutchman."

"Well," said Johnnie to his father, "he may be all right now, but I don't see it. Other time he was scared, but now he's too fresh."

Scully's speech was always a combination of Irish brogue and idiom, Western twang and idiom, and scraps of curiously formal diction taken from the story-books and newspapers. He now hurled a strange mass of

language at the head of his son. "What do I keep? What do I keep? What do I keep?" he demanded, in a voice of thunder. He slapped his knee impressively, to indicate that he himself was going to make reply, and that all should heed. "I keep a hotel," he shouted. "A hotel, do you mind? A guest under my roof has sacred privileges. He is to be intimidated by none. Not one word shall he hear that would prejudice him in favor of goin' away. I'll not have it. There's no place in this here town where they can say they iver took in a guest of mine because he was afraid to stay here." He wheeled suddenly upon the cowboy and the Easterner. "Am I right?"

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the cowboy, "I think you're right."

"Yes, Mr. Scully," said the Easterner, "I think you're right."

## V

At six-o'clock supper, the Swede fizzed like a fire-wheel. He sometimes seemed on the point of bursting into riotous song, and in all his madness he was encouraged by old Scully. The Easterner was incased in reserve; the cowboy sat in wide-mouthed amazement, forgetting to eat, while Johnnie wrathily demolished great plates of food. The daughters of the house, when they were obliged to replenish the biscuits, approached as warily as Indians, and, having succeeded in their purpose, fled with ill-concealed trepidation. The Swede domineered the whole feast, and he gave it the appearance of a cruel bacchanal. He seemed to have grown suddenly taller; he gazed, brutally disdainful, into every face. His voice rang through the room. Once when he jabbed out harpoon-fashion with his fork to pinion a biscuit, the weapon nearly impaled the hand of the Easterner which had been stretched quietly out for the same biscuit.

After supper, as the men filed towards the other room, the Swede smote Scully ruthlessly on the shoulder. "Well, old boy, that was a good, square meal." Johnnie looked hopefully at his father; he knew that shoulder was tender from an old fall; and, indeed, it appeared for a moment as if Scully was going to flame out over the matter, but in the end he smiled a sickly smile and remained silent. The others understood from his manner that he was admitting his responsibility for the Swede's new view-point.

Johnnie, however, addressed his parent in an aside. "Why don't you license somebody to kick you down-stairs?" Scully scowled darkly by way of reply.

When they were gathered about the stove, the Swede insisted on another game of High Five. Scully gently deprecated the plan at first, but the Swede turned a wolfish glare upon him. The old man subsided, and the Swede canvassed the others. In his tone there was always a great threat. The cowboy and the Easterner both remarked indifferently that they would play. Scully said that he would presently have to go to meet the 6.58 train, and so the Swede turned menacingly upon Johnnie. For a moment their glances crossed like blades, and then Johnnie smiled and said, "Yes, I'll play."

They formed a square, with the little board on their knees. The Easterner and the Swede were again partners. As the play went on, it was noticeable that the cowboy was not board-whacking as usual. Meanwhile, Scully, near the lamp, had put on his spectacles and, with an appearance curiously like an old priest, was reading a newspaper. In time he went out to meet the 6.58 train, and, despite his precautions, a gust of polar wind whirled into the room as he opened the door. Besides scattering the cards, it dulled the players to the marrow. The Swede cursed frightfully. When Scully returned, his entrance disturbed a cosy and friendly scene. The Swede again cursed. But presently they were once more intent, their heads bent forward and their hands moving swiftly. The Swede had adopted the fashion of board-whacking.

Scully took up his paper and for a long time remained immersed in matters which were extraordinarily remote from him. The lamp burned badly, and once he stopped to adjust the wick. The newspaper, as he turned from page to page, rustled with a slow and comfortable sound. Then suddenly he heard three terrible words: "You are cheatin'!"

Such scenes often prove that there can be little of dramatic import in environment. Any room can present a tragic front; any room can be comic. This little den was now hideous as a torture-chamber. The new faces of the men themselves had changed it upon the instant. The Swede held a huge fist in front of Johnnie's face, while the latter looked steadily over it into the blazing orbs of his accuser. The Easterner had grown pallid; the cowboy's jaw had dropped in that expression of bovine amazement which was one of his important mannerisms. After the three words, the first sound in the room was made by Scully's paper as it floated forgotten to his feet. His spectacles had also fallen from his nose, but by a clutch he had saved them in air. His hand, grasping the spectacles, now remained poised awkwardly and near his shoulder. He stared at the card-players.

Probably the silence was while a second elapsed. Then, if the floor

had been suddenly twitched out from under the men they could not have moved quicker. The five had projected themselves headlong towards a common point. It happened that Johnnie, in rising to hurl himself upon the Swede, had stumbled slightly because of his curiously instinctive care for the cards and the board. The loss of the moment allowed time for the arrival of Scully, and also allowed the cowboy time to give the Swede a great push which sent him staggering back. The men found tongue together, and hoarse shouts of rage, appeal, or fear burst from every throat. The cowboy pushed and jostled feverishly at the Swede, and the Easterner and Scully clung wildly to Johnnie; but, through the smoky air, above the swaying bodies of the peace-compellers, the eyes of the two warriors ever sought each other in glances of challenge that were at once hot and steely.

Of course the board had been overturned, and now the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor, where the boots of the men trampled the fat and painted kings and queens as they gazed with their silly eyes at the war that was waging above them.

Scully's voice was dominating the yells. "Stop now? Stop, I say! Stop, now--"

Johnnie, as he struggled to burst through the rank formed by Scully and the Easterner, was crying, "Well, he says I cheated! He says I cheated! I won't allow no man to say I cheated! If he says I cheated, he's a -----!"

The cowboy was telling the Swede, "Quit, now! Quit, d'ye hear--"

The screams of the Swede never ceased: "He did cheat! I saw him! I saw him--"

As for the Easterner, he was importuning in a voice that was not heeded: "Wait a moment, can't you? Oh, wait a moment. What's the good of a fight over a game of cards? Wait a moment--"

In this tumult no complete sentences were clear. "Cheat"--"Quit"--"He says"--these fragments pierced the uproar and rang out sharply. It was remarkable that, whereas Scully undoubtedly made the most noise, he was the least heard of any of the riotous band.

Then suddenly there was a great cessation. It was as if each man had paused for breath; and although the room was still lighted with the anger of men, it could be seen that there was no danger of immediate conflict, and at once Johnnie, shouldering his way forward, almost succeeded in confronting the Swede. "What did you say I cheated for?



What did you say I cheated for? I don't cheat, and I won't let no man say I do!"

The Swede said, "I saw you! I saw you!"

"Well," cried Johnnie, "I'll fight any man what says I cheat!"

"No, you won't," said the cowboy. "Not here."

"Ah, be still, can't you?" said Scully, coming between them.

The quiet was sufficient to allow the Easterner's voice to be heard. He was repealing, "Oh, wait a moment, can't you? What's the good of a fight over a game of cards? Wait a moment!"

Johnnie, his red face appearing above his father's shoulder, hailed the Swede again. "Did you say I cheated?"

The Swede showed his teeth. "Yes."

"Then," said Johnnie, "we must fight."

"Yes, fight," roared the Swede. He was like a demoniac. "Yes, fight! I'll show you what kind of a man I am! I'll show you who you want to fight! Maybe you think I can't fight! Maybe you think I can't! I'll show you, you skin, you card-sharp! Yes, you cheated! You cheated! You cheated!"

"Well, let's go at it, then, mister," said Johnnie, coolly.

The cowboy's brow was beaded with sweat from his efforts in intercepting all sorts of raids. He turned in despair to Scully. "What are you goin' to do now?"

A change had come over the Celtic visage of the old man. He now seemed all eagerness; his eyes glowed.

"We'll let them fight," he answered, stalwartly. "I can't put up with it any longer. I've stood this damned Swede till I'm sick. We'll let them fight."

## VI

The men prepared to go out-of-doors. The Easterner was so nervous that

he had great difficulty in getting his arms into the sleeves of his new leather coat. As the cowboy drew his fur cap down over his ears his hands trembled. In fact, Johnnie and old Scully were the only ones who displayed no agitation. These preliminaries were conducted without words.

Scully threw open the door. "Well, come on," he said. Instantly a terrific wind caused the flame of the lamp to struggle at its wick, while a puff of black smoke sprang from the chimney-top. The stove was in mid-current of the blast, and its voice swelled to equal the roar of the storm. Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall. The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea.

No snow was falling, but great whirls and clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic winds, were streaming southward with the speed of bullets. The covered land was blue with the sheen of an unearthly satin, and there was no other hue save where, at the low, black railway station--which seemed incredibly distant--one light gleamed like a tiny jewel. As the men floundered into a thigh deep drift, it was known that the Swede was bawling out something. Scully went to him, put a hand on his shoulder and projected an ear. "What's that you say?" he shouted.

"I say," bawled the Swede again, "I won't stand much show against this gang. I know you'll all pitch on me."

Scully smote him reproachfully on the arm. "Tut, man!" he yelled. The wind tore the words from Scully's lips and scattered them far alee.

"You are all a gang of--" boomed the Swede, but the storm also seized the remainder of this sentence.

Immediately turning their backs upon the wind, the men had swung around a corner to the sheltered side of the hotel. It was the function of the little house to preserve here, amid this great devastation of snow, an irregular V-shape of heavily incrustated grass, which crackled beneath the feet. One could imagine the great drifts piled against the windward side. When the party reached the comparative peace of this spot it was found that the Swede was still bellowing.

"Oh, I know what kind of a thing this is! I know you'll all pitch on me. I can't lick you all!"

Scully turned upon him panther fashion. "You'll not have to whip all

of us. You'll have to whip my son Johnnie. An' the man what troubles you durin' that time will have me to dale with."

The arrangements were swiftly made. The two men faced each other, obedient to the harsh commands of Scully, whose face, in the subtly luminous gloom, could be seen set in the austere impersonal lines that are pictured on the countenances of the Roman veterans. The Easterner's teeth were chattering, and he was hopping up and down like a mechanical toy. The cowboy stood rock-like.

The contestants had not stripped off any clothing. Each was in his ordinary attire. Their fists were up, and they eyed each other in a calm that had the elements of leonine cruelty in it.

During this pause, the Easterner's mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men--the iron-nerved master of the ceremony; the Swede, pale, motionless, terrible; and Johnnie, serene yet ferocious, brutish yet heroic. The entire prelude had in it a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action, and this aspect was accentuated by the long, mellow cry of the blizzard, as it sped the tumbling and wailing flakes into the black abyss of the south.

"Now!" said Scully.

The two combatants leaped forward and crashed together like bullocks. There was heard the cushioned sound of blows, and of a curse squeezing out from between the tight teeth of one.

As for the spectators, the Easterner's pent-up breath exploded from him with a pop of relief, absolute relief from the tension of the preliminaries. The cowboy bounded into the air with a yowl. Scully was immovable as from supreme amazement and fear at the fury of the fight which he himself had permitted and arranged.

For a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly revolving wheel. Occasionally a face, as if illumined by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots. A moment later, the men might have been known as shadows, if it were not for the involuntary utterance of oaths that came from them in whispers.

Suddenly a holocaust of warlike desire caught the cowboy, and he bolted forward with the speed of a broncho. "Go it, Johnnie! go it! Kill him! Kill him!"

Scully confronted him. "Kape back," he said; and by his glance the

cowboy could tell that this man was Johnnie's father.

To the Easterner there was a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination. This confused mingling was eternal to his sense, which was concentrated in a longing for the end, the priceless end. Once the fighters lurched near him, and as he scrambled hastily backward he heard them breathe like men on the rack.

"Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!" The cowboy's face was contorted like one of those agony masks in museums.

"Keep still," said Scully, icily.

Then there was a sudden loud grunt, incomplete, cut short, and Johnnie's body swung away from the Swede and fell with sickening heaviness to the grass. The cowboy was barely in time to prevent the mad Swede from flinging himself upon his prone adversary. "No, you don't," said the cowboy, interposing an arm. "Wait a second."

Scully was at his son's side. "Johnnie! Johnnie, me boy!" His voice had a quality of melancholy tenderness. "Johnnie! Can you go on with it?" He looked anxiously down into the bloody, pulpy face of his son.

There was a moment of silence, and then Johnnie answered in his ordinary voice, "Yes, I--it--yes."

Assisted by his father he struggled to his feet. "Wait a bit now till you git your wind," said the old man.

A few paces away the cowboy was lecturing the Swede. "No, you don't! Wait a second!"

The Easterner was plucking at Scully's sleeve. "Oh, this is enough," he pleaded. "This is enough! Let it go as it stands. This is enough!"

"Bill," said Scully, "git out of the road." The cowboy stepped aside. "Now." The combatants were actuated by a new caution as they advanced towards collision. They glared at each other, and then the Swede aimed a lightning blow that carried with it his entire weight. Johnnie was evidently half stupid from weakness, but he miraculously dodged, and his fist sent the over-balanced Swede sprawling.

The cowboy, Scully, and the Easterner burst into a cheer that was like a chorus of triumphant soldiery, but before its conclusion the Swede had scuffled agilely to his feet and come in berserk abandon at his foe. There was another perplexity of flying arms, and Johnnie's body

again swung away and fell, even as a bundle might fall from a roof. The Swede instantly staggered to a little wind-waved tree and leaned upon it, breathing like an engine, while his savage and flame-lit eyes roamed from face to face as the men bent over Johnnie. There was a splendor of isolation in his situation at this time which the Easterner felt once when, lifting his eyes from the man on the ground, he beheld that mysterious and lonely figure, waiting.

"Arc you any good yet, Johnnie?" asked Scully in a broken voice.

The son gasped and opened his eyes languidly. After a moment he answered, "No--I ain't--any good--any--more." Then, from shame and bodily ill he began to weep, the tears furrowing down through the blood-stains on his face. "He was too--too--too heavy for me."

Scully straightened and addressed the waiting figure. "Stranger," he said, evenly, "it's all up with our side." Then his voice changed into that vibrant huskiness which is commonly the tone of the most simple and deadly announcements. "Johnnie is whipped."

Without replying, the victor moved off on the route to the front door of the hotel.

The cowboy was formulating new and un-spellable blasphemies. The Easterner was startled to find that they were out in a wind that seemed to come direct from the shadowed arctic floes. He heard again the wail of the snow as it was flung to its grave in the south. He knew now that all this time the cold had been sinking into him deeper and deeper, and he wondered that he had not perished. He felt indifferent to the condition of the vanquished man.

"Johnnie, can you walk?" asked Scully.

"Did I hurt--hurt him any?" asked the son.

"Can you walk, boy? Can you walk?"

Johnnie's voice was suddenly strong. There was a robust impatience in it. "I asked you whether I hurt him any!"

"Yes, yes, Johnnie," answered the cowboy, consolingly; "he's hurt a good deal."

They raised him from the ground, and as soon as he was on his feet he went tottering off, rebuffing all attempts at assistance. When the party rounded the corner they were fairly blinded by the pelting of

the snow. It burned their faces like fire. The cowboy carried Johnnie through the drift to the door. As they entered some cards again rose from the floor and beat against the wall.

The Easterner rushed to the stove. He was so profoundly chilled that he almost dared to embrace the glowing iron. The Swede was not in the room. Johnnie sank into a chair, and, folding his arms on his knees, buried his face in them. Scully, warming one foot and then the other at a rim of the stove, muttered to himself with Celtic mournfulness. The cowboy had removed his fur cap, and with a dazed and rueful air he was running one hand through his tousled locks. From overhead they could hear the creaking of boards, as the Swede tramped here and there in his room.

The sad quiet was broken by the sudden flinging open of a door that led towards the kitchen. It was instantly followed by an inrush of women. They precipitated themselves upon Johnnie amid a chorus of lamentation. Before they carried their prey off to the kitchen, there to be bathed and harangued with that mixture of sympathy and abuse which is a feat of their sex, the mother straightened herself and fixed old Scully with an eye of stern reproach. "Shame be upon you, Patrick Scully!" she cried. "Your own son, too. Shame be upon you!"

"There, now! Be quiet, now!" said the old man, weakly.

"Shame be upon you, Patrick Scully!" The girls, rallying to this slogan, sniffed disdainfully in the direction of those trembling accomplices, the cowboy and the Easterner. Presently they bore Johnnie away, and left the three men to dismal reflection.

## VII

"I'd like to fight this here Dutchman myself," said the cowboy, breaking a long silence.

Scully wagged his head sadly. "No, that wouldn't do. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be right."

"Well, why wouldn't it?" argued the cowboy. "I don't see no harm in it."

"No," answered Scully, with mournful heroism. "It wouldn't be right. It was Johnnie's fight, and now we mustn't whip the man just because he whipped Johnnie."

"Yes, that's true enough," said the cowboy; "but--he better not get fresh with me, because I couldn't stand no more of it."

"You'll not say a word to him," commanded Scully, and even then they heard the tread of the Swede on the stairs. His entrance was made theatric. He swept the door back with a bang and swaggered to the middle of the room. No one looked at him. "Well," he cried, insolently, at Scully, "I s'pose you'll tell me now how much I owe you?"

The old man remained stolid. "You don't owe me nothin'."

"Huh!" said the Swede, "huh! Don't owe 'im nothin'."

The cowboy addressed the Swede. "Stranger, I don't see how you come to be so gay around here."

Old Scully was instantly alert. "Stop!" he shouted, holding his hand forth, fingers upward. "Bill, you shut up!"

The cowboy spat carelessly into the sawdust box. "I didn't say a word, did I?" he asked.

"Mr. Scully," called the Swede, "how much do I owe you?" It was seen that he was attired for departure, and that he had his valise in his hand.

"You don't owe me nothin'," repeated Scully in his same imperturbable way.

"Huh!" said the Swede. "I guess you're right. I guess if it was any way at all, you'd owe me somethin'. That's what I guess." He turned to the cowboy. "'Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!'" he mimicked, and then guffawed victoriously. "'Kill him!'" He was convulsed with ironical humor.

But he might have been jeering the dead. The three men were immovable and silent, staring with glassy eyes at the stove.

The Swede opened the door and passed into the storm, giving one derisive glance backward at the still group.

As soon as the door was closed, Scully and the cowboy leaped to their feet and began to curse. They trampled to and fro, waving their arms and smashing into the air with their fists. "Oh, but that was a hard

minute!" wailed Scully. "That was a hard minute! Him there leerin' and scoffin'! One bang at his nose was worth forty dollars to me that minute! How did you stand it, Bill?"

"How did I stand it?" cried the cowboy in a quivering voice. "How did I stand it? Oh!"

The old man burst into sudden brogue. "I'd loike to take that Swade," he wailed, "and hould 'im down on a shtone flure and bate 'im to a jelly wid a shtick!"

The cowboy groaned in sympathy. "I'd like to git him by the neck and ha-ammer him "--he brought his hand down on a chair with a noise like a pistol-shot--"hammer that there Dutchman until he couldn't tell himself from a dead coyote!"

"I'd bate 'im until he--"

"I'd show \_him\_ some things--"

And then together they raised a yearning, fanatic cry--"Oh-o-oh! if we only could--"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

"And then I'd--"

"O-o-oh!"

## VIII

The Swede, tightly gripping his valise, tacked across the face of the storm as if he carried sails. He was following a line of little naked, gasping trees, which he knew must mark the way of the road. His face, fresh from the pounding of Johnnie's fists, felt more pleasure than pain in the wind and the driving snow. A number of square shapes loomed upon him finally, and he knew them as the houses of the main body of the town. He found a street and made travel along it, leaning heavily upon the wind whenever, at a corner, a terrific blast caught him.

He might have been in a deserted village. We picture the world as



thick with conquering and elate humanity, but here, with the bugles of the tempest pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. One was a coxcomb not to die in it. However, the Swede found a saloon.

In front of it an indomitable red light was burning, and the snow-flakes were made blood color as they flew through the circumscribed territory of the lamp's shining. The Swede pushed open the door of the saloon and entered. A sanded expanse was before him, and at the end of it four men sat about a table drinking. Down one side of the room extended a radiant bar, and its guardian was leaning upon his elbows listening to the talk of the men at the table. The Swede dropped his valise upon the floor, and, smiling fraternally upon the barkeeper, said, "Gimme some whiskey, will you?" The man placed a bottle, a whiskey-glass, and a glass of ice-thick water upon the bar. The Swede poured himself an abnormal portion of whiskey and drank it in three gulps. "Pretty bad night," remarked the bartender, indifferently. He was making the pretension of blindness which is usually a distinction of his class; but it could have been seen that he was furtively studying the half-erased blood-stains on the face of the Swede. "Bad night," he said again.

"Oh, it's good enough for me," replied the Swede, hardily, as he poured himself some more whiskey. The barkeeper took his coin and maneuvered it through its reception by the highly nickelled cash-machine. A bell rang; a card labelled "20 cts." had appeared.

"No," continued the Swede, "this isn't too bad weather. It's good enough for me."

"So?" murmured the barkeeper, languidly.

The copious drams made the Swede's eyes swim, and he breathed a trifle heavier. "Yes, I like this weather. I like it. It suits me." It was apparently his design to impart a deep significance to these words.

"So?" murmured the bartender again. He turned to gaze dreamily at the scroll-like birds and bird-like scrolls which had been drawn with soap upon the mirrors back of the bar.

"Well, I guess I'll take another drink," said the Swede, presently. "Have something?"

"No, thanks; I'm not drinkin'," answered the bartender. Afterwards he asked, "How did you hurt your face?"

The Swede immediately began to boast loudly. "Why, in a fight. I thumped the soul out of a man down here at Scully's hotel."

The interest of the four men at the table was at last aroused.

"Who was it?" said one.

"Johnnie Scully," blustered the Swede. "Son of the man what runs it. He will be pretty near dead for some weeks, I can tell you. I made a nice thing of him, I did. He couldn't get up. They carried him in the house. Have a drink?"

Instantly the men in some subtle way incased themselves in reserve. "No, thanks," said one. The group was of curious formation. Two were prominent local business men; one was the district-attorney; and one was a professional gambler of the kind known as "square." But a scrutiny of the group would not have enabled an observer to pick the gambler from the men of more reputable pursuits. He was, in fact, a man so delicate in manner, when among people of fair class, and so judicious in his choice of victims, that in the strictly masculine part of the town's life he had come to be explicitly trusted and admired. People called him a thoroughbred. The fear and contempt with which his craft was regarded was undoubtedly the reason that his quiet dignity shone conspicuous above the quiet dignity of men who might be merely hatters, billiard markers, or grocery-clerks. Beyond an occasional unwary traveller, who came by rail, this gambler was supposed to prey solely upon reckless and senile farmers, who, when flush with good crops, drove into town in all the pride and confidence of an absolutely invulnerable stupidity. Hearing at times in circuitous fashion of the despoilment of such a farmer, the important men of Romper invariably laughed in contempt of the victim, and, if they thought of the wolf at all, it was with a kind of pride at the knowledge that he would never dare think of attacking their wisdom and courage. Besides, it was popular that this gambler had a real wife and two real children in a neat cottage in a suburb, where he led an exemplary home life; and when any one even suggested a discrepancy in his character, the crowd immediately vociferated descriptions of this virtuous family circle. Then men who led exemplary home lives, and men who did not lead exemplary home lives, all subsided in a bunch, remarking that there was nothing more to be said.

However, when a restriction was placed upon him--as, for instance, when a strong clique of members of the new Pollywog Club refused to

permit him, even as a spectator, to appear in the rooms of the organization--the candor and gentleness with which he accepted the judgment disarmed many of his foes and made his friends more desperately partisan. He invariably distinguished between himself and a respectable Romper man so quickly and frankly that his manner actually appeared to be a continual broadcast compliment.

And one must not forget to declare the fundamental fact of his entire position in Romper. It is irrefutable that in all affairs outside of his business, in all matters that occur eternally and commonly between man and man, this thieving card-player was so generous, so just, so moral, that, in a contest, he could have put to flight the consciences of nine-tenths of the citizens of Romper.

And so it happened that he was seated in this saloon with the two prominent local merchants and the district-attorney.

The Swede continued to drink raw whiskey, meanwhile babbling at the barkeeper and trying to induce him to indulge in potatoes. "Come on. Have a drink. Come on. What--no? Well, have a little one, then. By gawd, I've whipped a man to-night, and I want to celebrate. I whipped him good, too. Gentlemen," the Swede cried to the men at the table, "have a drink?"

"Ssh!" said the barkeeper.

The group at the table, although furtively attentive, had been pretending to be deep in talk, but now a man lifted his eyes towards the Swede and said, shortly, "Thanks. We don't want any more."

At this reply the Swede ruffled out his chest like a rooster. "Well," he exploded, "it seems I can't get anybody to drink with me in this town. Seems so, don't it? Well!"

"Ssh!" said the barkeeper.

"Say," snarled the Swede, "don't you try to shut me up. I won't have it. I'm a gentleman, and I want people to drink with me. And I want 'em to drink with me now. \_Now\_--do you understand?" He rapped the bar with his knuckles.

Years of experience had calloused the bartender. He merely grew sulky. "I hear you," he answered.

"Well," cried the Swede, "listen hard then. See those men over there? Well, they're going to drink with me, and don't you forget it. Now you

watch."

"Hi!" yelled the barkeeper, "this won't do!"

"Why won't it?" demanded the Swede. He stalked over to the table, and by chance laid his hand upon the shoulder of the gambler. "How about this?" he asked, wrathfully. "I asked you to drink with me."

The gambler simply twisted his head and spoke over his shoulder. "My friend, I don't know you."

"Oh, hell!" answered the Swede, "come and have a drink."

"Now, my boy," advised the gambler, kindly, "take your hand off my shoulder and go 'way and mind your own business." He was a little, slim man, and it seemed strange to hear him use this tone of heroic patronage to the burly Swede. The other men at the table said nothing.

"What! You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'll make you then! I'll make you!" The Swede had grasped the gambler frenziedly at the throat, and was dragging him from his chair. The other men sprang up. The barkeeper dashed around the corner of his bar. There was a great tumult, and then was seen a long blade in the hand of the gambler. It shot forward, and a human body, this citadel of virtue, wisdom, power, was pierced as easily as if it had been a melon. The Swede fell with a cry of supreme astonishment.

The prominent merchants and the district attorney must have at once tumbled out of the place backward. The bartender found himself hanging limply to the arm of a chair and gazing into the eyes of a murderer.

"Henry," said the latter, as he wiped his knife on one of the towels that hung beneath the bar-rail, "you tell 'em where to find me. I'll be home, waiting for 'em." Then he vanished. A moment afterwards the barkeeper was in the street dinning through the storm for help, and, moreover, companionship.

The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash-machine: "This registers the amount of your purchase."

## IX

Months later, the cowboy was frying pork over the stove of a little

ranch near the Dakota line, when there was a quick thud of hoofs outside, and presently the Easterner entered with the letters and the papers.

"Well," said the Easterner at once, "the chap that killed the Swede has got three years. Wasn't much, was it?"

"He has? Three years?" The cowboy poised his pan of pork, while he ruminated upon the news. "Three years. That ain't much."

"No. It was a light sentence," replied the Easterner as he unbuckled his spurs. "Seems there was a good deal of sympathy for him in Romper."

"If the bartender had been any good," observed the cowboy, thoughtfully, "he would have gone in and cracked that there Dutchman on the head with a bottle in the beginnin' of it and stopped all this here murderin'."

"Yes, a thousand things might have happened," said the Easterner, tartly.

The cowboy returned his pan of pork to the fire, but his philosophy continued. "It's funny, ain't it? If he hadn't said Johnnie was cheatin' he'd be alive this minute. He was an awful fool. Game played for fun, too. Not for money. I believe he was crazy."

"I feel sorry for that gambler," said the Easterner.

"Oh, so do I," said the cowboy. "He don't deserve none of it for killin' who he did."

"The Swede might not have been killed if everything had been square."

"Might not have been killed?" exclaimed the cowboy. "Everythin' square? Why, when he said that Johnnie was cheatin' and acted like such a jackass? And then in the saloon he fairly walked up to git hurt?" With these arguments the cowboy browbeat the Easterner and reduced him to rage.

"You're a fool!" cried the Easterner, viciously. "You're a bigger jackass than the Swede by a million majority. Now let me tell you one thing. Let me tell you something. Listen! Johnnie \_was\_ cheating!"

"Johnnie," said the cowboy, blankly. There was a minute of silence, and then he said, robustly, "Why, no. The game was only for fun."

"Fun or not," said the Easterner, "Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it. I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone. And you--you were simply puffing around the place and wanting to fight. And then old Scully himself! We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women really involved in every murder, but in this case it seems to be only five men--you, I, Johnnie, old Scully, and that fool of an unfortunate gambler came merely as a culmination, the apex of a human movement, and gets all the punishment."

The cowboy, injured and rebellious, cried out blindly into this fog of mysterious theory: "Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?"

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